

My Response to Bishop Rhoades Regarding the Old Covenant

By Robert Sungenis

NB: This essay will serve as a sequel to the essay I wrote that was published in *Culture Wars*, January 2008, titled: "The Old Covenant: Revoked or Not Revoked?" which also appears on our website at: <http://www.catholicintl.com/articles/The%20Old%20Covenant%20Revoked%20or%20Not%20Revoked%20for%20Culture%20Wars.pdf>

Unfortunately, because I have taken a strong stand on the revocation of the Old Covenant and have implicated various clerics and layman for not upholding this doctrine, the usual suspects have written all kinds of slanderous things on various blog sites in order to denigrate me in the public eye. Instead of applauding my *Culture Wars* essay for finally and definitively showing Catholics worldwide that the Old Covenant has been revoked and superseded by the New Testament and therefore no longer remains valid for the Jews; instead of applauding the fact that I clearly showed, amidst all the confusion for the past 25 years, that John Paul II, in his 1981 Mainz speech, never meant or intended to convey that the Mosaic covenant was never revoked but that the Abrahamic covenant, for both Jew and Gentile, remains unrevoked; instead of applauding the fact that I documented numerous Jewish individuals, Jewish groups, and their ideological sympathizers in their attempts to undermine Catholic doctrine on the Old and New Covenants by their outright rejection of supersessionism; instead of applauding the fact that I exposed the erroneous statement on page 131 of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* which states that the Mosaic covenant remains valid for the Jews; instead of applauding the reams of magisterial, scriptural and patristic evidence I uncovered showing that the Old Covenant has been revoked, what is the reaction from my "Catholic" opponents?

As usual, they are beside themselves with anguish. They are in blogger-world wringing their hands and gnashing their teeth against me. You can almost see the hatred and jealousy dripping from their typed texts. As usual, they take statements I've made out of context as proof texts for their trumped-up charges; they accuse me of the most sinister motives; they twist and distort various events that have occurred in the past, and, of course, they spread this gossip like wild fire on the Internet. One blogger even had the audacity to compare me to Bill Clinton. It is an amazing spectacle to watch.

At last count, my enemies have devoted at least two dozen different websites to spread their ill-conceived plans for my destruction. This has been their common fare for the past five years and I am fairly inoculated to it by now. Obviously, they have one purpose in mind – to silence Robert Sungenis, and they, indeed, appear very desperate, because all their similar doings in past years have not been successful. I am a thorn in their side that cannot be removed. And frankly, it won't faze me if they create 1000 website to attack me. I will still be here teaching Catholics the truth, especially about the revocation of the Old Covenant and exposing any Jew, Catholic or Protestant who tries to teach

differently. The Catholic public has made their decision by their undying support. The Bellarmine Theological Forum is here to stay.

The bottom line is this: if anyone teaches that the Old Covenant remains valid for the Jews; that the Old Covenant is not revoked and is not superseded by the New Covenant, it is vehemently suspect of heresy, plain and simple. I will not stop saying so unless the pope himself, in an *ex cathedra* statement, tells me that the Old Covenant is not revoked. Of course, that will never happen, because unlike many bishops, priests and laymen who are teaching the opposite, Pope Benedict XVI is on my side of the theological fence, since he has clearly taught in the past and maintains today that the Old Covenant has been superseded by the New, and thus the Old Covenant no longer remains valid for the Jews.

As for their malicious attacks against me, I will not be answering them. I will let the good Lord be their judge. I am not in this either to protect my own reputation, uplift myself, or to denigrate anyone else. My only interest is in the truth of the theological topic at hand – the status of the Old Covenant for the Jews. Anyone who wants to converse with me on that basis, my door is open. The only answer I will give them is the warning Jesus gave in Matthew 12:36: “Every careless word that men utter shall be given account thereof in the day of judgment,” and canon law 220, which states: “No one is permitted to harm illegitimately the good reputation which a person possesses nor to injure the right of any person to protect his or her own privacy.”

The Interview of Bishop Rhoades

One of the more prominent of the above blogs contains an interview with the Most Reverend Kevin C. Rhoades of Harrisburg, PA. It is a series of four questions regarding the Jews and the Old Covenant that was presented to him by postal letter. The questions were composed by Mr. Michael Forrest, an insurance salesman from Massachusetts. The bishop responded to the inquiry in a two-page letter, which Mr. Forrest subsequently advertised on the Internet as his proof that the bishop does not hold to what Mr. Forrest understands as “Dual Covenant theology.” This detail is important because Mr. Forrest accuses me of falsely accusing the bishop of holding to Dual Covenant theology. In order to defend myself against this accusation, I must delve deeply into the interview of Bishop Rhoades. Since Bishop Rhoades has made his views public and apparently gave Mr. Forrest permission to advertise his position on the Internet in full view of the public, I feel likewise obliged to respond in public to him and Mr. Forrest through this essay.

Before I show the interview, I want to point out that, after examining it in detail, I see what amounts to a very carefully designed set of questions that end up failing to ask the bishop the very question that is absolutely necessary to know precisely where he stands on this issue. At no time is the bishop asked this simple question: “Bishop Rhoades, do you believe that the Old Covenant remains valid for the Jews today, such that it has not been revoked or superseded by the New Covenant?” Instead, the words “valid,” “revoked” and “superseded,” which, if anyone has been paying attention to this issue for the last five years, are the most important legal words related to the topic of the Old Covenant today, yet are missing from the interview, whether by design or ignorance. Hence, it is my considered opinion that

the interview with Bishop Rhoades proves nothing, except that the questioner either didn't know what he was doing or had designed the questions specifically to side-step the most crucial issue at hand.

The interview of the bishop was recently advertised on the website of *Catholics United for the Faith*, with its president, Leon Suprenant, as the interlocutor. Although Mr. Suprenant begins his remarks by making some personal charges against me, I will simply ignore them. All I will say is that they are untrue, all of them. I will only address the theological assertions that Mr. Suprenant presents from Bishop Rhoades. The theological part of the interview begins as follows, from which I will make intermittent comments:

Suprenant: ...Bishop Rhoades recently answered a series of questions in order to present clearly the Church's teaching regarding her relationship with the Jewish people.

(1) Do you believe that the Jewish people have their own independent salvific covenant with God, apart from Jesus Christ, so that there are two independent saving covenants in effect today, one for Jews and one for Gentiles?

Bishop Rhoades: I have always believed and taught that Christ established a new and eternal covenant through his own death and resurrection. I have always believed and taught that this is the definitive covenant which will never pass away. I do not believe that the Jewish people have their own independent salvific covenant with God, apart from Jesus Christ. It is not correct to speak of two independent saving covenants in effect today, one for Jews and one for Gentiles, since Jesus is the only Savior, who continues His saving work in the Church and by means of the Church, His Body. There is only one salvific economy. As Pope John Paul II taught in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, "No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit." I have always affirmed the unicity and universality of the salvific mystery of Jesus Christ. The salvation possible for our Jewish brothers and sisters, indeed for any person, is only through the grace of Christ.

R. Sungenis: First, as we have learned from poll-takers who frame their questions in order to extract a desired answer, we must take notice how this first question is specifically phrased to Bishop Rhoades. Bishop Rhoades is not asked if the Old Covenant has been revoked and replaced by the New Covenant; rather, he is asked whether the Jews have an independent saving covenant apart from Jesus Christ. What may be the possible motivation for asking a question in this way? One possibility is that the interviewer is trying to make room for the continuing validity and application of the Old Covenant for the Jews by suggesting that, as long as the Old Covenant is not independent of Jesus Christ, it can serve in some desired capacity for the Jews. Again, what Bishop Rhoades should have been asked is whether the Old Covenant has been revoked and superseded by the New Covenant, in addition to asking him what he understands by the word "revoked" and "superseded." If the bishop answered "yes" to the revocation and supersession of the Old Covenant, then it would have been clearly understood that he does not believe in "dual covenant" theology. Unfortunately, and perhaps by design, none of those pointed questions were asked of Bishop Rhoades in this interview.

Second, in my *Culture Wars* article (as well as the updated version that appears on our website at www.catholicintl.com), I said that the bishop's vicar general, Fr. William King, made the following statement to me and Thomas Herron at our August 2007 meeting in Harrisburg: "we do not believe in supersessionism any longer." Further, Fr. King repeatedly told us that he was "speaking for the Bishop." Hence, because of Fr. King's use of the plural "we," and his confirmation that he was "speaking for the Bishop" at this particular meeting, it was only appropriate for me to conclude, as I did in my *Culture Wars* essay, the following statement: "the belief in Dual Covenant theology that he [Bishop Rhoades] and USCCB were apparently promoting." If the implication I am making from Fr. King's statements is wrong and Bishop Rhoades is not promoting Dual Covenant theology, and thereby accepts the revocation of the Old Covenant and that it has been superseded by the New Covenant, then it behooves him to: (a) correct the beliefs of his vicar general, Fr. King, and/or (b) state that Fr. King does not "speak for the bishop" and his views on the Old Covenant, and (c) clarify to the public that he, the bishop, does not believe that the Old Covenant remains valid for the Jews but that it has been revoked and superseded by the New Covenant. I, in turn, will retract my statement that Bishop Rhoades is apparently teaching this erroneous theology.

That being said, the same honesty requires me to insist that, when the bishop's answer to the question in the interview is analyzed very carefully, he does not deny that the Old Covenant remains a valid covenant for the Jewish people today. For example, in Bishop Rhoades' above statement, he says:

"I do not believe that the Jewish people have their own independent salvific covenant with God, apart from Jesus Christ."

This is not a statement that affirms the revocation of the Old Covenant. It merely asserts that the Jewish people do not have a salvific covenant "apart from Jesus Christ." In other words, being prompted by a leading question, it may be the case that Bishop Rhoades follows suit and thus holds that the Old Covenant can remain valid for the Jews as long as the Old Covenant is somehow connected to Jesus Christ. This possibility is not in a vacuum, since, as we will see later in the interview, the bishop supports and does not deny the recent statement made on page 131 of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA) that says: "the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them." To support this statement, the bishop must, in some way, believe that the Mosaic covenant, the Old Covenant, remains valid for the Jews and has not been revoked. Conversely, if he does not support it, then he must deny that the Mosaic covenant remains valid for the Jews and conclude that the USCCA has made an error in its catechism. Again, you will notice if you read the entire interview, at no time does the bishop specifically say that the Old Covenant is no longer valid for the Jews, or that it has been revoked, or that it has been superseded by the New Covenant.

Similarly, although a little less obvious, we find the same tactic in the bishop's following statement:

"I have always believed and taught that Christ established a new and eternal covenant through his own death and resurrection. I have always believed and taught that this is the definitive covenant which will never pass away."

The problem here, of course, is that designating the New Covenant as “the definitive covenant” does not negate the possibility that the Old Covenant could serve as a less than definitive covenant and thus remain a valid covenant for the Jews.

The next question of the interview is:

(2) Do you believe that anyone reaches heaven without the mediation of Jesus Christ?

Bishop Rhoades: I think your second question is answered above, but I will repeat that I do not believe anyone can reach heaven without the mediation of Jesus Christ. As Saint Paul wrote to Timothy: “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:4-6).

R. Sungenis: Here again I must point out the distinct possibility of evasiveness and ambiguity. Part of the problem is caused by the leading question asked of the bishop (“Do you believe that anyone reaches heaven without the mediation of Jesus Christ?”). In the Catholic faith, we take as a given theological fact that no one “reaches heaven without the mediation of Jesus Christ,” so the question is superfluous, unless, of course, the interviewer has an ulterior theological motive for asking it. Is the interviewer, himself, contending for the position that the Old Covenant is, in some way, valid for the Jews as long as it is somehow “mediated” by Jesus Christ? If so, it is an erroneous belief.

Be that as it may, as regards the beliefs of Bishop Rhoades, the main issue of this controversy is not whether someone can be saved without Christ’s mediation, but whether the Old Covenant remains valid for the Jewish people. This is a simple case of the law of non-contradiction. If it is valid, then it has not been revoked. If it is not valid, then it has been revoked. There is no neutral position to which one can escape (*e.g.*, that the Old Covenant remains valid but is also revoked). Unfortunately, it is THAT precise question which Bishop Rhoades neither answers nor is asked in this interview. If Bishop Rhoades believes that the Old Covenant is revoked in the same way, for example, that Cardinal Ratzinger spoke about its revocation in his book *Many Religions: One Covenant* when he stated: “the Sinai covenant has indeed been superseded” (p. 70), then at some point either in this interview or in some other venue, Bishop Rhoades should not be afraid to say:

“The Old Covenant has been revoked and has been superseded by the New Covenant. This means that the Old Covenant is no longer valid for the Jews, for a revoked covenant can no longer have any legal validity. There is only one covenant existing today, and that is the New Covenant in Jesus Christ.”

Unfortunately, without that specific statement, or similar statement, Bishop Rhoades could very well believe that the Old Covenant remains valid for the Jews, just as Fr. King and the USCCB catechism apparently does. If so, it is an erroneous belief.

The next question in the interview is:

(3) Do you understand anything on page 131 of the U.S. Catechism for Adults to mean that the Jewish people (or any group) have their own, independent saving path to God, outside of Jesus Christ?

Bishop Rhoades: I do not interpret anything on page 131 of the U.S. Catechism for Adults to mean that the Jewish people (or any group) have their own independent saving path to God, outside of Jesus Christ. I can see how the one statement that “the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them” might be misunderstood. I would interpret it to mean that the Jewish people retain a special relationship to God because of the Old Covenant, but I would not interpret it to mean that the Jewish people can be saved through the Old Covenant apart from Christ.

R. Sungenis: Once again, the question posed by the interviewer seems to be calculated, for it adds the phrase “outside of Jesus Christ.” As such, the question could be implying that, although “independent saving paths to God” are invalid by themselves, they are not invalid if they are not “outside of Jesus Christ,” whereby they inevitably become dependent on Christ rather than independent. Consequently, Bishop Rhoades may have inferred such an intent from the question, since he also used the two phrases “outside of Jesus Christ” and “apart from Christ” in his answer.

I must also add that the interview of Bishop Rhoades is not a live, verbal interview in which erroneous remarks could be made by mistake, but one in which questions and answers were exchanged in written form. As such, both the questions and the answers were thought out very carefully before they were put to pen and paper. In any event, if the interviewer really desired to get to the truth of what Bishop Rhoades believes about the Old Covenant, he should have asked the bishop if he believed the Old Covenant could save the Jews if the Old Covenant is “not apart from Christ.” If the bishop said yes, then that, too, would be theologically erroneous, since the Old Covenant cannot be joined to Christ for the salvation of the Jews, because it has been revoked and superseded by the New Covenant, and it never had the power to save in the first place.

Page 131 of the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

The reason that the precise intent of both the questions and the answers of the interview are important for us to probe regards their connection to the provocative statement of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA) on page 131. On this page the USCCA: (a) asserts that the Mosaic covenant remains valid for the Jews today, and, (b) strongly implies by its grammatical structure that the Mosaic covenant is salvific for the Jews. In regards to (b), note the underlined words in the same paragraph of page 131:

When God called Abraham out of Ur, he promised to make of him a ‘great nation.’ This began the history of God’s revealing his divine plan of salvation to a chosen people with whom he made enduring covenants. Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them.

I dare say that few people with expertise in catechetical instruction, biblical interpretation, or English grammatical analysis are going to miss what seems to be an obvious attempt by the USCCA to connect the “divine plan of salvation” procured by “enduring covenants” with the conclusion introduced by the word “thus” that will inevitably lead the reader to believe that the Mosaic covenant remains “eternally valid for the Jewish people” precisely because it is one of the enduring covenants through which God provides his divine plan of salvation for the Jews. I don’t see any other conclusion that can be reached due to the use of the connecting word “thus” by the USCCA.

If providing salvation through the Mosaic covenant was not intended by the USCCA, then what other purpose does the USCCA specify for its assertion that the Mosaic covenant remains eternally valid for the Jews? Unfortunately, the USCCA provides no other reason, or even suggestion of a reason. Suffice it to say, an eternal covenant cannot exist as a mere figurehead or symbolic emblem. It must exist for a definitive reason. Hence, we are left with the USCCA’s leading statement (“his divine plan of salvation to a chosen people with whom he made enduring covenants”), which specifies that the context of its remark about the endurance of the Mosaic covenant is none other than the intended salvation of the Jews. If that is the meaning and intent of the USCCA’s paragraph, it is vehemently suspect of heresy.

Bishop Rhoades’ Interpretation of Page 131:

With those facts in view, I will now deal with Bishop Rhoades’ treatment of page 131 of the USCCA. He states in the interview:

I can see how the one statement that “the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them” might be misunderstood. I would interpret it to mean that the Jewish people retain a special relationship to God because of the Old Covenant, but I would not interpret it to mean that the Jewish people can be saved through the Old Covenant apart from Christ.

First, again we see the addition of the phrase “apart from Christ” to the bishop’s statement. If the bishop finds it difficult to say, plainly: “the Jewish people cannot be saved through the Old Covenant” and end the sentence without adding “apart from Christ,” then his statement is ambiguous and he could very well intend to mean that the Jews can be saved by the Old Covenant, as long as the Old Covenant is not “apart from Christ.” For the record, the idea that the Old Covenant can be valid and salvific if it is connected in some way to Jesus Christ, is being circulated today by various people, but it is just as erroneous as the belief that the Old Covenant can save by itself.

Second, Bishop Rhoades says that he understands why the statement on page 131 of the USCCA “might be misunderstood.” That is, indeed, an understatement. Here we have a statement issued by the highest Catholic organization in the United States, one that unmistakably ties together “God’s divine plan of salvation” with “the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses” yet the most Bishop Rhoades, an ordained shepherd who is required to protect his flock from heresy, will commit himself to say about this highly provocative assertion which has never before been uttered in a Catholic document for the last two thousand years, is that it could possibly be “misunderstood.” That being the case, I sincerely question Bishop Rhoades’ ability to judge this issue with any theological accuracy. Page

131 of the USCCA is a simple black and white issue. Either the Old Covenant remains eternally valid for the Jewish people or it does not. There is no in-between state in which the Old Covenant can exist. Hence, it is my contention that it is Bishop Rhoades who “misunderstands” what the USCCA is actually saying.

Third, contrary to Bishop Rhoades’ interpretation of page 131, the USCCA did not say “the Jews have a special relationship with God because of the Old Covenant.” The USCCA stated, specifically and clearly, that the Mosaic covenant remains valid for the Jews, eternally because of “God’s divine plan of salvation,” and thus we can only conclude that the authors of the USCCA believe that the Mosaic covenant, the Old Covenant, has never been revoked from the Jews. In effect, Bishop Rhoades’ interpretation of page 131 and the actual words of the USCCA are entirely two different statements.

This is an extremely important crossroads, for if the Mosaic covenant was never revoked, then Scripture, Tradition and the Catholic magisterium are false, because all three authorities have plainly said that the Old Covenant, the Mosaic covenant, was, indeed, revoked, as I made clear by the extensive documentation from all three authorities in my *Culture Wars* essay. Hence, there is nothing to “misunderstand” about the USCCA’s statement on page 131. This is a simple matter of the law of non-contradiction. Since the New Testament says the Old Covenant is revoked (2 Cor 3:6-14; Heb 7:18; 8:13; 10:9; Eph 2:15; Col 2:15) then the Old Covenant cannot “remain eternally valid for the Jews.” Anyone who says the opposite must be vehemently suspect of heresy, and anyone who tries to whitewash the USCCA’s error must be in collusion with the USCCB.

Fourth, even if we were to seek some way of accommodating Bishop Rhoades’ interpretation of page 131, where has the Catholic Church taught that the Jews retain a “special relationship to God because of the Old Covenant”? Simple research into the patristics, the saints, the councils and the papal decrees will reveal that the Catholic Church has never taught such an idea. Irrespective of that evidence, what are we supposed to understand by the phrase “special relationship”? The word “special” does not have any theological or spiritual meaning. It is an ambiguous term that has no place in these discussions.

If Bishop Rhoades would like to say, instead, that the Jews are “beloved” of God, as Romans 11:28 says, he would then have made a correct statement. But even in that case, this “beloved” state does not arise “because of the Old Covenant,” for St. Paul does not mention the Old Covenant in Romans 11:28 as the cause of God’s love for the Jews. In fact, the only time St. Paul mentions the Old Covenant in his epistles is to tell us that the Old Covenant is revoked (2 Cor 3:6-14; Heb 7:18; 8:13; 10:9; Eph 2:15; Col 2:15). The truth is, God’s love cannot be based on a revoked covenant, but on the New Covenant that will never be revoked.

In Romans 11:28, St. Paul says only that the Jews are beloved “for the sake of the fathers,” not for the sake of the Old Covenant. The “fathers” are the people of ancient Israel who accepted God and the salvation he offered, such as Abraham (Rom 4:1-24). The “fathers” were faithful to God and, as Jesus said of Abraham, “looked forward to My day” (John 8:56), the day of the New Covenant in His blood (Luke 1:71-77). Because of the undying faith of the “fathers,” God promised not to cut off the Jews entirely when Christ came. Because of the promise to the “fathers,” God still offers the Jews the same

salvation that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were offered. Conversely, God, because of the Jews' constant disobedience in the Old Testament, could have totally rejected them, never again offering them salvation. But because of the faithfulness of the "fathers," God showed mercy to the Jews and thus still allowed them to come to salvation, the same as everyone else in the world. This is precisely St. Paul's argument in the opening lines of Romans 11:1-5, and he points to his own salvation as proof of the mercy God is still extending to the Jews, if they will only listen and convert.

But let it be made clear that God's love for the Jews has nothing whatsoever to do with a covenant that has been revoked, the Old Covenant. In fact, we can safely say that because of God's love for the Jews he had no choice but to revoke the Old Covenant, precisely because the Old Covenant had no power to save the Jews and never did (Gal 3:10-12)! God's love brought the Jews face to face with the New Covenant, and it is now up to them to accept that gracious gift. In effect, God loves the Jews because of the New Covenant, not because of the Old Covenant.

At this point I must reiterate that, after hearing the bishop's vicar general, Fr. King, state at our August 2007 meeting: "we do not believe in supersessionism any longer," and seeing Fr. Massa, the Secretary for Interreligious Affairs at the USCCB who was also at the meeting, refrain from applauding Pope Benedict's new prayer for the conversion of the Jews, instead saying that it will be said by only a "tiny minority of Catholics and they will hear it in Latin,"¹ along with the USCCB's Catechism which insists that, in the context of "God's divine plan of salvation" that "the Mosaic covenant remains eternally valid for the Jews," it is my grave suspicion that Bishop Rhoades is not telling us that he believes in supersessionism, but is, either out of ignorance or purpose, seeking to cover over the error of the USCCB's catechism by creating some kind of hybrid between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant saying, in effect, that the Old Covenant is still valid for the Jews provided that the Old Covenant is put under the umbrella of the "mediation of Christ." If so, that position is just as erroneous as saying that the Old Covenant has salvific power in itself. The Catholic Church has never taught any kind of legal or salvific mixing and matching of the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. The Old Covenant no longer exists as a valid and legal covenant for the Jews, period. In fact, it never had the power to provide salvation even when it was legal, much less does it have such power when it is no longer legal. The word "superseded" means that one entity replaces the previous entity. Hence, any attempt to resurrect the Old Covenant, except as a guide to ethics and morals that the New Covenant might adopt as its own, is categorically fallacious.

Recently, one priest from the USCCB, Msgr. Daniel Kutys, answering an inquiry from a Catholic blogger to the USCCA's statement on page 131 had this to say:

"My understanding of the meaning of that statement is your final observation...["an affirmation that the Jews retain a special relationship to God because of the Old Covenant, while not stating that the Jewish people can be saved apart from Christ"] God never goes back on his word. But as you also suspect, the enduring nature of the Covenant does not preclude that one day all people will come to Christ and the responsibility all Catholics have to

¹ "Conservative Rabbis to Vote on Resolution Criticizing Pope's Revision of Prayer," *New York Times*, Neela Banerjee, Feb. 9, 2008.

evangelize others about the need for faith in the Triune God revealed in and through Jesus Christ.”

Unfortunately, Monsignor Kutys, speaking on behalf of the USCCB, has only exacerbated the problem rather than rectify it. First, we see in the Monsignor’s words the same error that we saw in Bishop Rhoades’ interpretation of the USCCA, since Kutys refers to the Jews as having a “special relationship to God because of the Old Covenant.” Perhaps Bishop Rhoades exchanged notes with Monsignor Kutys prior to answering the four questions of the interview, since their answers are identical.

Second, Monsignor Kutys confirms our suspicions that he and the USCCA do, actually, believe that the Old Covenant remains in force for the Jews, for he says above, in reference to the Old Covenant, “...the enduring nature of the covenant.” If the Old Covenant is “enduring,” then obviously, according to Monsignor Kutys, it has not been revoked or superseded by the New Covenant, unless, of course, Kutys is attaching some vague and ambiguous meaning to the word “nature” that he does not reveal to us.

Third, we see the same misunderstanding from Monsignor Kutys about God’s workings and intentions that is common among many today. It erroneously concludes that, because “God cannot go back on his word,” this means that God cannot revoke the Old Covenant. This kind of conflation shows us how easily people can twist Scripture to their own agenda. The error is solved, however, by realizing that the “word” God “cannot take back” (Rom 11:29) does not refer to the Old Covenant, but to God’s promise of the New Covenant in Jesus Christ (Luke 1:68-79; Hebrews 6:13-10:31). If this were not the case, then the New Covenant could never say (but as it clearly does) that the Old Covenant, the Mosaic covenant, was revoked and replaced entirely by the New Covenant (Hebrews 7:18; 8:7-13; 10:9; Eph 2:15; Col 2:15; 2 Cor 3:6-14). In other words, it is the very “word of God,” the New Testament scriptures, that tells us that the Old Covenant is revoked. In fact, if God were to unvoke or reestablish the Old Covenant, it is only THEN that He would be “going back on his word,” just the precise opposite of what Monsignor Kutys is teaching. Unfortunately, the blogger who posted this letter apparently didn’t have the theological wherewithal to figure out what the Monsignor was actually saying, or, in fact, he agrees with the Monsignor in his error.

“Another Gospel”

The sad fact is, if any legal or eternal validity is given to the Old Covenant for the Jews in the face of the fact that it has been revoked and superseded by the New Covenant, we then have, as St. Paul describes it in the Galatian epistle, “another gospel.” St. Paul’s warning about the promotion of “another gospel” is described in the rest of the Galatian epistle as the intrusion of Judaistic teaching into the New Testament gospel. There is no more serious and detrimental Judaistic teaching than for someone to claim that the Old Covenant remains valid for the Jews and thereby, on that basis, they retain special favor from God, or even salvation. In chapter one, St. Paul makes a solemn warning to those who intend to mix Judaistic teaching with the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

6) I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by (the) grace (of Christ) for a different gospel

7) (not that there is another). But there are some who are disturbing you and wish to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach (to you) a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed!

In my opinion, I believe St. Paul pays such an inordinate amount of attention to the heresy of Judaizing in the New Testament (for it is addressed in almost every book) precisely because Judaizing would not only be the major doctrinal error in the churches surrounding the First Coming of Christ, but also near and leading up to the Second Coming of Christ. Unfortunately, that eventuality is precisely what we are seeing today as many cardinals and bishops of the world cave in to the pressure from Jewish individuals and organizations to recognize the Old Covenant as a valid covenant for the Jewish people.

Scripture and Canon Law:

In any case, since Bishop Rhoades has made his views public in a postal letter, and apparently gave his permission to have those views advertised on the Internet, I have the canonical right to point out these contrary arguments to him and the Catholic public, which come both from both Scripture and Canon Law. As for Scripture, St. Paul says in the following verses:

9) As we have said before, and now I say again, if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one that you received, let that one be accursed!

10) Am I now currying favor with human beings or God? Or am I seeking to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.

Teaching that the Old Covenant, the Mosaic covenant, is still valid for the Jews, as the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* certainly does, is “another gospel.” All Catholics should be anathematizing the USCCA instead of making excuses for it, including Bishop Rhoades.

As for Canon Law, the following Canons give me the right to pursue this course of action:

- Canon 221.1: “The Christian faithful can legitimately vindicate and defend the rights which they possess in the Church in the competent ecclesiastical forum according to the norm of law.”
- Canon 221.3: “The Christian faithful have the right not to be punished with canonical penalties except according to the norm of law.”
- Canon 223: “In exercising their rights, the Christian faithful...must take into account the common good of the Church, the rights of others, and their own duties toward others.”
- Canon 212: “The Christian faithful...According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful...with reverence toward their pastors...”

- Canon 229: “Lay persons are bound by the obligation and possess the right to acquire knowledge of Christian doctrine...announce it themselves, defend it if necessary...”
- Canon 1476: “Anyone, whether baptized or not, can bring action in a trial; however, a party legitimately summoned must respond.”

In order to clarify where they stand, Bishop Rhoades, the USCCB and its Catechism, as well as CUF, should state specifically and clearly that they believe the following:

- the Old Covenant, the Mosaic covenant, has been revoked and replaced entirely (i.e., superseded), by the New Covenant. It is not a “valid” covenant and it does not continue “eternally.”
- the Old Covenant cannot save the Jews, even if the Old Covenant is somehow promoted as being tied to the New Covenant, or tied to the Abrahamic covenant, or under the mediation of Jesus Christ, or is categorized as “not being apart from Christ” or “not outside of Christ.”
- that the Jew, barring instances of invincible ignorance that can only be judged by God, can only be saved by converting to the New Covenant and forsaking any dependence on the Old Covenant.

If they will not affirm the above statements, then my criticism of their theological stance on the Jews and the Old Covenant remains, and it will be my considered opinion that they are holding to or teaching erroneous beliefs that are suspect of heresy.

If any of them wish to open up discussions with me on this issue, my door is always open. In September 2007 I invited the bishop to such a discussion, but he did not accept my invitation.

Finally, the last question of the interview:

(4) Do you believe that the Church is called to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all peoples, including the Jewish people?

Bishop Rhoades: Of course. I believe that the Church is called to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all peoples, including the Jewish people. This is the Church’s missionary mandate, received from Christ. That is why I so strongly support and promote the Propagation of the Faith and the Church’s missionary endeavors. But the Church’s missionary activity must always be marked by profound respect for people of other religions and profound respect for their religious freedom. It must be marked, above all, by profound charity in word and deed. We must always proclaim the truth with charity. By the way, this is my episcopal motto: “Veritatem in caritate” [truth in charity].

R. Sungenis: Yes, I agree, whole-heartedly. We should have “respect” and be “charitable” regarding other religions at all times. It is my “motto,” however, and the motto of the Catholic Church throughout its history, that the respect and charity shown to other religions cannot be at the expense of Catholic truth. Both truth and charity need to work together. The most uncharitable thing we could do to a person of another religion is water down the Gospel or distort it in some way under the guise that it will be less offensive and thus more charitable to him. As St. Paul warns in Galatians 1:6-9, those who do so will be accursed.

Robert Sungenis

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