

Dialogue between Michael Forrest and Robert Sungenis

on the Conversion of the Jews:

M. Forrest: Bob, There is some interesting and good information in this article that I hadn't come across before. However, there are a few things that struck me. I'll throw them by you. Some relate to current/secular Israel (and I'm not saying I'm a supporter of Zionism at all by this, just that some questions came to mind that I think others who ARE would likely ask), and some relate to the issue of a "future spiritual restoration" of God's "firstborn" (and in relation to this aspect, I do still tend to disagree with you):

1) (The first 4 relate mostly to the physical/land aspects of "restoration") What is the import of the opinion of Orthodox Jews in relation to eschatological matters or any theological matters, really? They are not the bearers of prophecy any longer, orthodox, conservative, reform or other.

2) Why must one pit Divine action against seemingly "natural" or "secular" action in relation to the restoration of Israel as a nation? As we have discussed before in relation to "miracles" etc, there is no necessary contradiction between the two (naturalistic/miraculous). And just as we see in the "messy" and often political dealings within the Church Herself, binding and infallible teachings can even come from such places, so there is no intrinsic incompatibility.

3) The article says that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants will be "fulfilled in eternity". Doesn't Catholic theology posit that eternity is not disconnected from our time, but is rather something that is breaking into the temporal realm more and more completely since the first coming of Christ? Eternity is not something "in the future", but something that already "exists" and can be "experienced", even now in our human condition.

4) There are several Scriptural passages that strike me:

1) Jer 16:14-18, 2) Jer 27:22, 3) Jer 32:42-33, 4) Ezek 39:26-27. How do these fit into your interpretation (in regard to a physical restoration)? I'm not sure of the time line.

5) (From here on, my points relate more to the spiritual restoration)... The apostle John (John 19:37) quotes from part of Zecharia 12:10-13. Only the first part "looking on him whom they pierced through" has occurred, to my knowledge. When do you believe, exactly, that the house of David, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the family of Nathan, the family of the house of Levi, the family of Shemei etc, "mourned for" Christ "as one mourns for an only son," and "grieved over him as one grieves over a first born"? And in the context as you frame it (in regard to what Israel is and is not in prophecy), how is it possible for this to occur?

6) You wrote: "The traditional Catholic position has essentially been that the promises made to the Jewish people have been literally fulfilled in the person of Christ and in the Catholic Church, and that to look for physical fulfillment is to miss what separates the New from the Old Testament." I would like to see the documentation for this, that it is really one and absolutely

NOT the other (and either/or) and that the approach of "both/and" is excluded (i.e. "Israel" is correctly and prophetically dealt with both on the spiritual level AND on a more physical level to at least some degree). If it is, then it would seem that Jerome, Cyril, Chrysostom (see my quotes below), Augustine (I have a couple of quotes below), Ott, and even the 1909 Catholic Encyclopedia must have completely missed this clear position. Is it really that established and clear at all?

7) There are other quotes from the fathers and even Aquinas, Ott, and the 1909 Catholic Encyclopedia (not some Kasperian/VII invention) that were not mentioned (and which support the idea of some kind of unusual action of regrafting in the future).

a) **Aquinas**, in examining a number of alternative interpretations of the phrase "resurrection of the dead" (Rom 11), settles on the following: "What, I say, will such an admission effectuate, if not that it bring the Gentiles back to life? **The Gentiles would be the believers whose faith has grown cold, or even that the totality, deceived by the Antichrist, fall and are restored to their pristine fervor by the admission of the Jews.**" (Comm. Ep. to the Rom. 11:15)

b) **The 1909 Catholic Encyclopedia** has this to say: "(B) Universal and Cosmic Eschatology.- 6) Notwithstanding Christ's express refusal to specify the time of the end (Mrak xiii, 32, Acts i, 6 sq) it was a common belief among early Christians that the end of the world was near. This seemed to have some support in certain sayings of Christ in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which are set down in the Gospels side by side with the prophecies relating to the end (Matt 24, Luke 21), and in certain passages of the Apostolic writings, which might, not unnaturally, have been so understood (but see II Thes, ii, s2 sqq) where St. Paul corrects this impression.) **On the other hand, Christ had clearly stated that the Gospel was to be preached to all the nations before the end (Matt 24:14) and St. Paul looked forward to the ultimate conversion of the Jewish people as a remote event to be preceded by the conversion of the Gentiles** (Rom xi, 25 sqq).

c) **Augustine**, NPNF, Vol 8, pages 345-346, #10 talks about a restoration of OT Israel (comparing it with the account of Moses and his hand being white, leperous, then restored to health after being drawn back to his breast) and pages 438-439, #10: "After these stern penalties which have been recorded as having been inflicted upon this people and kingdom (Israel), that God might not be supposed to have fulfilled His promises in it, and so not to grant another kingdom in Christ, of which kingdom there shall be no end, the prophet addresses Him in these words, 'Lord, how long wilt Thou hid Thyself unto the end?' (v 46). For possibly it was not from them and to the end; because 'blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gneitles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved.' but in the mean while 'shall Thy wrath burn like fire.'"

d) **Chrysostom** NPNF Vol 11, page 489, vese 12): "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?...! For if when they stumbled, he says, so many enjoyed salvation, and when they were case out so many were called, **just consider what will be the case when they return.**Now, he does not say, 'how much more their'return, or their altering, or their well-doing, but 'how much more their fulness', **that is, when they are all about coming in.**"

e) **Chrysostom** NPNF Vol 11, page 490, Ver 15: "For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?'But see also even in his favors to them, how he solaces them in words only. 'For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world,' (and what is this to the Jews?) 'what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?' Yet even this was no boon to them, unless they had been received. But what he means is to this effect: **If in anger with them He gave other men so great gifts, when He is reconciled to them what will He not give?**" Clearly, Chrysostom seems to be talking about "them", as a group. Otherwise the sentence doesn't make sense. *Notice also that Chrysostom says, "WHEN", not "IF".*

f) **Chrysostom**: (Homily on Ep. to the Rom, chap 11): "Seeing the Gentiles abusing little by little their grace, **God will recall a second time the Jews.**"

g) **Jerome**: (Comm. to the Song of Songs, Homily 1) : "Their sins occasioned the salvation of the Gentiles **and again the incredulity of the Gentiles will occasion the conversion of Israel.** You will find both in the Apostle (St. Paul)."

You know the quote from Ludwig Ott that clearly conveys the expectation of a future restoration, but you somewhat dismiss/discount it because you don't think much of his exegesis or focus thereon. Yet, I still maintain that it is still noteworthy.....especially as the article claims, that such a position is so clearly not in line with the historical teaching of the Church.

8) **Luke 13:34-35**: "I tell you (speaking to the inhabitants of Jerusalem), you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'blessings be on him who comes in the name of the Lord.'" This cannot, IMO, be the heavenly Jerusalem, in this context, it would make no sense.

9) **Luke 21:24**....."Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

BTW.....I sent many of these to you in March of 2002. So they may look familiar. You never responded to them at that time.

M. Forrest: 1) (The first 4 relate mostly to the physical/land aspects of "restoration") What is the import of the opinion of Orthodox Jews in relation to eschatological matters or any theological matters, really? They are not the bearers of prophecy any longer, orthodox, conservative, reform or other.

R. Sungenis: I didn't write that part of the article.

M. Forrest: Why must one pit Divine action against seemingly "natural" or "secular" action in relation to the restoration of Israel as a nation? As we has discussed before in relation to "miracles" etc, there is no necessary contradiction between the two naturalistic/miraculous). And just as we see in the "messy" and often political dealings within the Church Herself, binding and infallible teachings can even come from such places, so there is no intrinsic incompatibility.

R. Sungenis: Because there is no "secular" or "natural" action promised in Scripture. They have already been fulfilled, and Israel's time is over. If they are saved, they join the Church. That is the only "natural" place God is dealing with.

M. Forrest: 3) The article says that God's promise to Abraham and his descendents will be "fulfilled in eternity". Doesn't Catholic theology posit that eternity is not disconnected from our time, but is rather something that is breaking into the temporal realm more and more completely since the first coming of Christ? Eternity is not something "in the future", but something that already "exists" and can be "experienced", even now in our human condition.

R. Sungenis: I don't know any Catholic dogmatic teaching that says that, Mike. The dogma is clear that this world will end at the last day, Judgment Day, and then the eternal state will come. That is why Abraham is still waiting for his land, according to Heb 11.

M. Forrest: 4) There are several Scriptural passages that strike me: 1) Jer 16:14-18, 2) Jer 27:22, 3) Jer 32:42-33, 4) Ezek 39:26-27. How do these fit into your interpretation (in regard to a physical restoration)? I'm not sure of the time line.

R. Sungenis: They were all fulfilled in the return from captivity in Babylon. The books of Nehemiah, Ezra, et al, are very detailed about that. The only one that might have an application to the distant future is Ezek 39, since it follows the reference to Gog and Magog in Ezek 38, which relates to Apoc 11 and 20.

M. Forrest: 5) (From here on, my points relate more to the spiritual restoration)... The apostle John (John 19:37) quotes from part of Zecharia 12:10-13. Only the first part "looking on him whom they pierced through" has occurred, to my knowledge. When do you believe, exactly, that the house of David, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the family of Nathan, the family of the house of Levi, the family of Shemei etc, "mourned for" Christ "as one mourns for an only son," and "grieved over him as one grieves over a first born"? And in the context as you frame it (in regard to what Israel is and is not in prophecy), how is it possible for this to occur?

R. Sungenis: It occurred right after their "looking on him whom they pierced," since Pentecost was a fulfillment of all the prophecies of God's spiritual restoration of Israel. That is why Acts 2 quotes from Joel's prophecy about God "pouring out His Spirit," the same "pouring out" of the Spirit mentioned in Zech 12:10. It is why Acts 15:16-18 quotes from Amos 9 regarding the "rebuilding of the tabernacle of David," which relates directly to the "house of David" in Zech 12:10-12. There is more I could give.

M. Forrest: 6) You wrote:

"The traditional Catholic position has essentially been that the promises made to the Jewish people have been literally fulfilled in the person of Christ and in the Catholic Church, and that to look for physical fulfillment is to miss what separates the New from the Old Testament." I would like to see the documentation for this, that it is really one and absolutely NOT the other (and either/or) and that the approach of "both/and" is excluded (i.e. "Israel" is correctly and prophetically dealt with both on the spiritual level AND on a more physical level to at least some

degree). If it is, then it would seem that Jerome, Cyril, Chrysostom (see my quotes below), Augustine (I have a couple of quotes below), Ott, and even the 1909 Catholic Encyclopedia must have completely missed this clear position. Is it really that established and clear at all?

R. Sungenis: There are a few Fathers that looked for some ethnic or physical blessing, but by and large, the Fathers are very divided on this issue, and there really is no consensus among them. They waffle back and forth between a remnant and a larger group; and they waffle back and forth between a spiritual and ethnic restoration. Cyril and Jerome are more adamant. Augustine has several views, as does Chrysostom. As for Ott, he questions a "morally universal conversion of the Jews," and says that the view of Elijah returning to preach to the Jews is erroneous. The CE just makes a statement with no exegesis or patristic consensus.

M. Forrest: 7) There are other quotes from the fathers and even Aquinas, Ott, and the 1909 Catholic Encyclopedia (not some Kasperian/VII invention) that were not mentioned (and which support the idea of some kind of unusual action of regrafting in the future). a) Aquinas, in examining a number of alternative interpretations of the phrase "resurrection of the dead" (Rom 11), settles on the following: "What, I say, will such an admission effectuate, if not that it bring the Gentiles back to life? The Gentiles would be the believers whose faith has grown cold, or even that the totality, deceived by the Antichrist, fall and are restored to their pristine fervor by the admission of the Jews." (Comm. Ep. to the Rom. 11:15)

R. Sungenis: I believe he is wrong. Aquinas, as opposed to the Fathers, was the first one who used the word "universal" in reference to Jewish conversion. His view is unprecedented, and his exegesis of Romans 11:15 is faulty. Rom 11:14 speaks of "some" of the Jews being saved by Paul in his day. Rom 11:15 follows this and says, "FOR....their acceptance is life from the dead." Hence, the conversion of "some" Jews, from the time of Paul to our day, IS the resurrection from the dead. There is not some future resurrection that Paul refers to.

M. Forrest: b) The 1909 Catholic Encyclopedia has this to say: "(B) Universal and Cosmic Eschatology.- 6) notwithstanding Christ's express refusal to specify the time of the end (Mrak xiii, 32, Acts i, 6 sq) it was a common belief among early Christians that the end of the world was near. This seemed to have some support in certain saying of Christ in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, which are set down in the Gospels side by side with the prophecies relating to the end (Matt 24, Luke 21), and in certain passages of the Apostolic writings, which might, not unnaturally, have been so understood (but see II Thes, ii, s2 sqq) where St. Paul corrects this impression.) On the other hand, Christ had clearly stated that the Gospel was to be preached to all the nations before the end (Matt 24:14) and St. Paul looked forward to the ultimate conversion of the Jewish people as a remote event to be preceded by the conversion of the Gentiles (Rom xi, 25 sqq).

R. Sungenis: As I said above, merely proof-texting Romans 11:25-26, without any exegesis or patristic consensus, can hardly serve as a convincing argument.

M. Forrest: c) Augustine, NPNF, Vol 8, pages 345-346, #10 talks about a restoration of OT Israel (comparing it with the account of Moses and his hand being white, leperous, then restored to health after being drawn back to his breast) and pages 438-439, #10: "After these stern

penalties which have been recorded as having been inflicted upon this people and kingdom (Israel), that God might not be supposed to have fulfilled His promises in it, and so not to grant another kingdom in Christ, of which kingdom there shall be no end, the prophet addresses Him in these words, 'Lord, how long wilt Thou hid Thyself unto the end?' (v 46). For possibly it was not from them and to the end; because 'blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved.' but in the mean while 'shall Thy wrath burn like fire.'"

R. Sungenis: Again, Augustine is equivocal, as he is in many places. Above he says "For POSSIBLY it was not from them and to the end." He is showing you that he is not sure.

M. Forrest: d) Chrysostom NPNF Vol 11, page 489, verse 12): "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness?... For if when they stumbled, he says, so many enjoyed salvation, and when they were cast out so many were called, just consider what will be the case when they return.Now, he does not say, 'how much more their' return, or their altering, or their well-doing, but 'how much more their fulness', that is, when they are all about coming in."

R. Sungenis: Since Chrysostom is basing this on his personal exegesis of the text, and not on some patristic consensus he inherited, then we can argue on the basis of his exegesis. As it stands, his exegesis is faulty, since he is reading into the passage things that are not definitive.

M. Forrest: f) Chrysostom NPNF Vol 11, page 490, Verse 15: "'For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?' ...But see also even in his favors to them, how he solaces them in words only. 'For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world,' (and what is this to the Jews?) 'what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?' Yet even this was no boon to them, unless they had been received. But what he means is to this effect: If in anger with them He gave other men so great gifts, when He is reconciled to them what will He not give?'" Clearly, Chrysostom seems to be talking about "them", as a group. Otherwise the sentence doesn't make sense. Notice also that Chrysostom says, "WHEN", not "IF".

R. Sungenis: Chrysostom is making the same mistake with Romans 11:14-15, since he's missed that the "some" is the fulfillment of life from the dead. And again, we can argue this point, since Chrysostom is basing his view on the interpretation of the text, not on an apostolic or patristic consensus.

M. Forrest: g) Chrysostom: (Homily on Ep. to the Rom, chap 11): "Seeing the Gentiles abusing little by little their grace, God will recall a second time the Jews." h) Jerome: (Comm. to the Song of Songs, Homily 1) : "Their sins occasioned the salvation of the Gentiles and again the incredulity of the Gentiles will occasion the conversion of Israel. You will find both in the Apostle (St. Paul)."

R. Sungenis: Nothing definitive about this, and there is certainly no exegesis involved. As for Chrysostom, nowhere does Romans 11 speak about God recalling the Jews "a second time."

M. Forrest: You know the quote from Ludwig Ott that clearly conveys the expectation of a future restoration, but you somewhat dismiss/discount it because you don't think much of his exegesis or focus thereon. Yet, I still maintain that it is still noteworthy.....especially as the article claims, that such a position is so clearly not in line with the historical teaching of the Church.

R. Sungenis: No, I don't dismiss it at all. In fact, I use Ott as support of my position on this issue.

M. Forrest: 8) Luke 13:34-35:

"I tell you (speaking to the inhabitants of Jerusalem), you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'blessings be on him who comes in the name of the Lord.'" This cannot, IMO, be the heavenly Jerusalem, in this context, it would make no sense.

The verse is not definitive of any particular time, so it supports neither of us. Paul's answer to Mt 23:39's subjunctive mood ("until you say") is outlined in Rm 10:18-11:14 by references to the "remnant" or "some" of Israel who will turn to Christ, which, as the book of Acts records, is in process of fulfillment (cf., Ac 2:1-3:26; 15:16-18). By use of the subjunctive mood, the verse is not saying that the Jews WILL say "blessed is he...." but that they won't see him "until" if and when they do.

9) Luke 21-24.

BTW.....I sent many of these to you in March of 2002. So they may look familiar. You never responded to them at that time.

R. Sungenis: Mike, I can safely say that I don't see one passage in the NT that speaks definitively of a ethnic, physical or national restoration of the Jews. All I see is a spiritual working in a remnant of Jews until the end of time. If I am missing something, I'll gladly be corrected, but I don't see any proof of that in what you presented.