

Will the Jews Convert in the Future?

Robert Sungenis Responds to James Akin's View of Paragraph 674 of the Catholic Catechism

In the latest [This Rock](#), James Akin makes the following statements:

"I have encountered converts who have responded with incredulity to the idea of a future conversion of the Jews, sometimes accusing those who make this claim of repeating Dispensationalist teaching.

"In the worst cases, I have seen converts from both these perspectives try to rationalize away binding declarations of Catholic teaching - like the Catechism's rejection of millennialism (CCC 676) or its affirmation of the future conversion of the Jews (CCC 674)."

Although I have much respect for Mr. Akin and his abilities, unfortunately, this is an instance in which he is simply reading into the text what he desires to see.

Mr. Akin asserts that Paragraph 674 teaches that there will be a "conversion" of the Jews in the future, and that such a teaching is a "binding" Catholic doctrine.

The truth is that Paragraph 674 teaches none of the things Mr. Akin asserts.

In order to understand what paragraph 674 is saying, we will analyze it sentence by sentence and compare it with the context of Romans 11. Here is the first sentence in the Catechism:

The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel," for "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" in their "unbelief" toward Jesus [Rom 11:20-26; Matt 23:39].

First, let me make it clear at the outset that when Mr. Akin uses the phrase "the future conversion of the Jews," he is referring to the belief that there will come a time in the distant future (distant, at least, from the time of the writing of the New Testament) in which the Jews will experience a mass conversion to Christ and Christianity. (NB: This, of course, is predicated on the fact that Mr. Akin is using the word "conversion" in the normal sense of the word, in contradistinction to his novel way of defining "conversion" which he expressed in an earlier issue of *This Rock* in addressing the conversion of Russia predicted in the message of Fatima).

For what it's worth, most of those who believe in a future mass conversion of Jews originate from the ranks of Protestant evangelicals who believe that Christ's return to earth is imminent, and that His arrival will initiate the conversion of the Jews, en masse, who will then reign with

Him from Jerusalem for 1000 years. Whether or not Mr. Akin believes in the same future millennium I do not know, but he does believe in the same mass conversion.

Does the above sentence from the Catechism teach that there will be a mass conversion of Jews in the future? Not at all. The Catechism is merely making a statement of fact that the Messiah's return is suspended until his recognition by "all Israel." Rather than explain the meaning of the passages in Romans 11, the Catechism is content to leave most of its wording as quotations. Hence, whatever meaning is drawn from the Catechism is that of the interpreter, not the Catechism itself.

In the interpretation of the sentence, there is nothing either in the text of the Catechism's paragraph or the context of Romans 11 that refer the events to the future. In fact, the Catechism's wording, which is hardly anything more than a series of Scripture passages from the New Testament, is so arranged that it does not commit itself to one view, and thus it seeks to make nothing binding on the individual conscience, except the Scriptural passages from which it quotes, whatever they mean.

As it stands, the Catechism could be referring to nothing more than the fact that during the Church age (in which we are presently existing) God has been saving Jews from all over the world. Romans 11:5 is clear, for example, that in regards to the conversion of the Jews to Christ, "there has also come to be at the PRESENT TIME a remnant according to God's gracious choice." This is no surprise, since the book of Acts records that God had been saving Jews since the time of Pentecost. The original Christian Church was composed mostly of Jews, and Jews have been converting to the Church ever since, albeit, as Paul says, it has only been a "remnant."

God will continue to save a "remnant" of Jews until the end of time. Moreover, the coming of the Messiah at the end of time will not occur until every last Jew that God intends to save comes into the world and is saved (cf., 2Peter 3:9). When every last Jew is saved that God intends to save, it can then be said that "all Israel will be saved," as Paul says in Romans 11:26.

We must note that the crucial phrase in Romans 11:26 ("and so all Israel shall be saved") is not giving a time reference to when Israel will be saved but is merely showing the manner in which Israel will be saved. Unfortunately, some translate the passage as "and then all Israel will be saved," seeking to inject a view which anticipates salvation for the Jews at some unspecified time in the future, and which is not occurring in the present.

But Paul's original Greek does not allow such an interpretation. If Paul wanted to establish a time reference for the future he had plenty of Greek words at his disposal he could have used. As it stands, the word "so" is the Greek word HOUTOS. It is an adverb which modifies the verb "saved," and thus describes the manner Israel will be saved, not when Israel will be saved.

The only manner of salvation described in the context of Romans 11 is in reference to the "remnant" (Rom 11:5) in Israel who turn from their sins of unbelief (Rom 11:23). This manner of saving Jews was occurring in Paul's day, and it is the reason he himself says that he anticipates saving "some" of his countrymen (Rom 11:14).

The context tells us that Paul is concerned with the salvation of Jews living in his day, and our day, not to a group of Jews at some unspecified time in the distant future. This is the same reason that he says: "to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews" (1Cor 9:20). But Paul does not have any grand illusions about a mass conversion of Jews, in his day or in the future. There is not one word in Romans 11 anticipating a mass conversion of Jews, nor in any other text of Paul's writings.

How, then, does Paul expect to see the conversion of Jews accomplished? As he says in Romans 11:14, "if somehow I might...save SOME of them." "Some" is a portion of Israel. Its intimation of a small but steady quantity refers back to the "remnant" that Paul said were being saved "in this present time" (Rom 11:5).

Paul further describes the potential of an ongoing salvation of Jews in Romans 11:23: "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." Whenever a Jew of Paul's day (or our day) turned from his unbelief to Christ, he was "grafted into" the tree once again.

The Catechism continues:

"St. Peter says to the Jews of Jerusalem after Pentecost: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old." [Acts 3:19-20].

The Catechism correctly recognizes that the message of salvation to the Jews began on the day of Pentecost. This was in fulfillment of what was promised to the Jews in the Old Testament (cf., Luke 1:46-55; 67-79). Accordingly, 3,000 people, mostly Jews, were baptized on Pentecost day (cf., Acts 2:5, 10, 22-41; Romans 2:9-10). The prophecies of the Old Testament were not pointing to a conversion of Jews in the distant future, but to the conversions which started right at Pentecost and continued in the "remnant" of Jewish believers throughout the Church age.

The Catechism continues:

"St Paul echoes him: "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" [Rom. 11:15].

This is another passage that Mr. Akin apparently interprets as referring to a mass conversion of Jews in the distant future. But the Catechism says no such thing. Again, the Catechism merely quotes the passage from Romans 11:15 without any commentary.

If we look closely at Romans 11:15 we will see that Paul is not referring to a mass conversion in the distant future, but to the saving of Jews in the time Paul lived. How do we know this? By connecting verse 15 to the previous verse.

In verse 14 Paul says, "if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow-countrymen and save some of them." Here we see Paul is anticipating saving "some" Jews during his lifetime. Acknowledging this fact, Paul then says in verse 15: "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" Notice the word "For" (Greek: *gar*) which begins verse 15. The word "For" is serving to introduce the result, explanation or conclusion of the action in verse 14. Since verse 14 refers to saving "some" Jews in Paul's day, Paul then describes these conversions in verse 15 as "their acceptance" and "life from the dead."

Why were the Jews considered "dead"? One reading of the gospels will reveal that, by the time of Jesus, the Jews were in almost total unbelief. But now, anytime a Jew converts to Christ, whether in Paul's day, our day, or in the distant future, it is "life from the dead," and thus God's promise to Abraham that he has "not rejected his people" (Romans 11:1-2) continues to be fulfilled. We don't have to wait for the promise to be fulfilled in the distant future. What good would that do for Jews living the last two thousand years?

In Romans 11:1-2, Paul himself says that his own conversion to Christ, an "Israelite from the tribe of Benjamin," is proof that God has not rejected His ancient people but is saving them continually in the Church of the New Covenant, the very covenant that He promised to Abraham (Galatians 3:6-8).

The Catechism continues:

"The 'full inclusion' of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of 'the full number of the Gentiles,' [Rom 11:12, 25; cf., Lk 21:24] will enable the people of God to achieve 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,' in which 'God may be all in all.'" [Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 15:28]

Again, Mr. Akin is probably reading this sentence with futuristic glasses, but it says nothing specifically of the future. It is merely a quotation of three passages in Paul's epistles. But as we have seen of the other passages the Catechism quotes, all of them speak of what is happening PRESENTLY, not what will happen in the future.

Consequently, as the Church age progresses, the "remnant" of Jews being saved (Romans 11:5, 14) will be included with the Gentiles who are saved. At the end of time both groups will have reached their "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

The undeniable fact is that the Jews are being added to Christ "at the present time" (Romans 11:5). It is neither a future political revival in the land of Israel nor a mass conversion of Jews reserved for the end of time, but, as Paul says, a "remnant" or "some" who experience "life from the dead" in his day and in ours.

All of this was accomplished by the "Deliverer" who came out of Zion to establish his "covenant" with Jacob (Romans 11:26; Hebrews 8:10-12; 10:16-18), which refers to the first coming of Christ (cf., Luke 1:68-79).

Robert Sungenis

Catholic Apologetics International

3-12-03