

## Pusillanimous Prelates Backslide on the Jews

Five US bishops, Francis George, William Keeler, Wilton Gregory, William Lori and William Murray have arbitrarily decided to eliminate two sentences from the recent USCCB committee document of June 18 titled, “A Note on Ambiguities Contained in ‘Reflections on Covenant and Mission.’” The two sentences to be deleted are:

*For example, Reflections on Covenant and Mission proposes interreligious dialogue as a form of evangelization that is "a mutually enriching sharing of gifts devoid of any intention whatsoever to invite the dialogue partner to baptism." Though Christian participation in interreligious dialogue would not normally include an explicit invitation to baptism and entrance into the Church, the Christian dialogue partner is always giving witness to the following of Christ, to which all are implicitly invited.*

The five bishops then made some summary statements about the future course of dialogue with the Jews, as follows:

1. Pope John Paul II summed up the teaching of the Catholic Church when he said that “God chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and made with them a covenant of eternal love, which was never revoked.” Jewish covenantal life endures till the present day as a vital witness to God’s saving will for His people Israel and for all of humanity.

**R. Sungenis:** Yes, John Paul II said that God made a covenant with Abraham, and he was correct. But the New Testament and official Catholic doctrine (taught by none other than John Paul II in numerous encyclicals) adds that in order to be a member of Abraham’s covenant, any individual, Jew or Gentile, must accept Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world. Any person who refuses Jesus Christ, is not, and cannot, be a member of Abraham’s eternal covenant. Hence, the bishops’ reference to an ongoing “Jewish covenantal life” is misplaced, since only when a Jew accepts Jesus Christ does he possess the covenant that God gave to Abraham. A Jew does not have “covenantal life” simply for being a Jew. Jews, as a race and as a religious body, reject Jesus Christ as the divine Son of God, and therefore they do not have a covenant with God but are already under condemnation, as Jesus said in John:

Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (John 3:18 NAB)

What the bishops should have said is: “the Jewish people endure till the present day as a vital witness to God’s saving will for His people Israel and for all of humanity,” for God does not revoke his gifts and call to the Jewish people to receive salvation in Jesus Christ (Romans 11:28-

30).” Unless the Jew converts to Jesus Christ, he will not have either a covenant or salvation, and thus he will remain under condemnation. Of course, the five bishops have just made it much more difficult to get that specific message across to the Jews since they have now declared that “dialogue” with the Jews will not include an invitation to conversion to Jesus Christ through Baptism. “Dialogue” has once again returned to nothing more than a mutual admiration society.

The five bishops also said the following:

2. At the same time, in the faith that comes to us from the apostles, Jesus Christ is the unique savior of all humankind, who fulfills in himself all of God’s promises and covenant with the people of Israel. Faith in him as the divine Son of God is first and foremost a gift of God, and the free human response to that gift can never be coerced.

**R. Sungenis:** But witnessing to the Jew about Christ and inviting him to Baptism by means of “dialogue” does not *coerce* the Jew to accept Jesus Christ, it only invites him to do so. The Jew still has the free will to reject Jesus Christ if he so chooses. Our sole responsibility as faithful witnesses of the Gospel is to warn the Jew of the consequences of his refusal to accept Christ. The five bishops don’t seem to grasp that concept. They seem to have no sense of urgency to give the Gospel to the Jews. There is no sense of God’s eternal judgment upon those who refuse to accept Jesus Christ. There is only a concern for the here and now. In their entire approach to the Jews the bishops have never discussed how and when we should preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews. It is simply not part of the equation. Incidentally, last week the Italian Bishops Conference declared that they were no longer going to preach the Gospel to the Jews. They are therefore in apostasy.

The bishops then state:

3. Catholics have a sacred responsibility to bear witness to Christ at every moment of their lives, but lived context shapes the form of that witness to the Lord we love. Jewish-Catholic dialogue, one of the blessed fruits of the Second Vatican Council, has never been and will never be used by the Catholic Church as a means of proselytism—nor is it intended as a disguised invitation to baptism. In sitting at the table, we expect to encounter Jews who are faithful to the Mosaic covenant, just as we insist that only Catholics committed to the teachings of the Church encounter them in our dialogues.

**R. Sungenis:** But where did Vatican II teach that dialogue with the Jews could not, and does not, include a “witness to Christ” or “invitation to Baptism”? *Nostra Aetate* says nothing about refraining from inviting Jews to accept Jesus Christ and be baptized, nor does it imply that a “lived context” could rule out verbal proclamation (*i.e.*, preaching the Gospel by word). These stipulations are inventions of these five bishops, not teachings of Vatican II. Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* make it crystal clear that our responsibility to the Jews and every other unsaved person in the world is to preach the Gospel by word and deed, not just deed.

Moreover, “Proselytism,” as used lately by the CDF in the document “The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness,” does not cite the Jews, but only Christian churches (Protestant and Catholic) who seek to take people by manipulative methods from each other’s congregations, otherwise known as “sheep stealing.” But Jews are not Christians; they have not received Baptism, and therefore “proselytism” does not include or apply to them, and thus the CDF document makes no reference to the Jews. Jews are unevangelized and therefore cannot be proselytized. Presenting them with the Gospel by direct, honest, and charitable means is not “proselytism.” Since the Jews specifically deny Jesus Christ as God and Savior, they are as lost, if not more so, than the pygmy in Africa. Consequently, even more effort should be garnered to bring the Gospel to the Jews than other lost peoples.

Although it is true that “in sitting at the table, we expect to encounter Jews who are faithful to the Mosaic covenant,” once we make that “encounter” our job is to teach the Jew that the Mosaic covenant has been revoked and is no longer a legitimate covenant for him to follow, even as the body of US bishops voted in June 2008 by 231 to 14 to excise the heretical statement from the *US Catholic Catechism for Adults* which said that the Mosaic covenant was still valid for the Jews. Of course, the evangelization of the Jews does not necessarily have to take place in the same session as the “dialogue” about other issues, but it does need to take place *somewhere*. For instance, dialogue with those of other religions (Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, *etc.*) has been organized by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Non-Christians, which does not include calls to conversion during its own sessions. But at the same time, the Vatican’s Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (*Propaganda Fide*) is busy organizing, supporting and fostering the preaching of the Gospel, in different situations, to followers of these very same religions, in accord with Vatican II’s *Decree on Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes)* and John Paul II’s Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*. The same approach should be adopted with believers in Judaism who need the Gospel no less than all other non-Christians. But if we enter into dialogue with the Jew and never reach the point of telling him that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete and that only adherence to the New Covenant in Jesus Christ will save his soul (which has been the case for the last 40 years of Catholic-Jewish dialogue), then we have made dialogue a tool of the devil to keep the Jew in his blindness. It is as simple as that.

Moreover, Cardinal Keeler, one of the five bishops who signed this six-statement letter to Jewish rabbis, is already under suspicion for having an ulterior motive for his present stipulation that “Jewish-Catholic dialogue...has never been and will never be used by the Catholic Church as a means of proselytism—nor is it intended as a disguised invitation to baptism,” since he stated quite plainly in his *Reflections on Covenant and Missions* document in 2002 that “A deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people, together with a recognition of a divinely-given mission to Jews to witness to God’s faithful love, lead to the conclusion that campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church.” Since the bishops have never followed up these statements with specific mandate fostering an evangelism program to the Jews, it seems they are

deliberately curtailing any Christian witness of the Gospel to the Jews, irrespective of “dialogue.”

The five bishops then state:

4. While the work of theologians makes an invaluable contribution to interrreligious dialogue, it falls to the bishops of the Church, acting in harmony with the pope, to represent authoritatively what Catholics believe. As our dialogue continues to move forward, we on the Catholic side have a responsibility to our Jewish partners to distinguish for them when a statement refers to Church teaching and when it is a theological opinion of scholars.

**R. Sungenis:** The operative phrase in the above paragraph is “bishops of the Church,” as in all the 246 bishops of the United States, not merely five bishops who give their own opinion to five Jewish rabbis. Whether the remaining 241 bishops agree with what these five bishops have proposed is something we will not know unless the bishops vote on the matter and make the vote an official teaching of the USCCB, and even then it would have to be “in harmony with the Pope” and thus should wait for approval from the Vatican, just as the Vatican gave its “recognitio” to the recent vote of the bishops in June 2008 to delete a sentence from the US Adult Catechism. Five bishops who sign a letter to Jewish rabbis (some who have previously circumvented Catholic doctrine, e.g., Cardinal Keeler’s infamous *Reflections on Covenant and Mission* document which included some of the most serious heresies the Church has ever seen) do not make Catholic doctrine, and thus their proposed changes in the above six points, standing in contrast as they do with sound Catholic doctrine, are no higher in authority than the “theological opinion of scholars” from which they chose to distinguish themselves.

The five bishops then state:

5. A catechism is a compendium of the articles of faith, and therefore contains only settled teaching. The recent change in the United States Adult Catholic Catechism, which concerned the matter of the Mosaic covenant, was made to meet the pedagogical needs of catechumens and other adult learners while reflecting the solid teaching of Vatican II on God’s fidelity to the Jewish People

**R. Sungenis:** That being the case, “God’s fidelity to the Jewish people” cannot include our “encountering Jews who are faithful to the Mosaic covenant,” without warning these same Jews that allegiance to the Mosaic covenant and continual rejection of the New Covenant in Christ will result in their eternal condemnation.

Furthermore, the recent deletion of the statement in the US Adult Catechism concerning the Mosaic covenant was not merely “to meet the pedagogical needs of catechumens and other adult learners.” It was changed because it is heretical for a Catholic catechism to say that the Mosaic covenant is eternally valid for the Jewish people when Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium

teach the opposite. Deletion of a published national catechetical statement is serious business, and I can think of no other time in Catholic history that something like it has occurred. Let's be honest. The US bishops who voted 231 to 14 to make the deletion, with the risk of upsetting the Jewish community, would not have done so merely for "pedagogical needs." These five bishops are insulting our intelligence. The real truth is that they got caught trying to foist their religious social agenda into formal Catholic doctrine and they are now trying to make excuses for it. All they need do is admit that the sentence on page 131 of the US Catechism was an error, and we can all move on.

The five bishops then conclude with:

6. We remain deeply committed to dialogue and friendship with the Jewish people, who are, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "our elder brothers and sisters in the faith." Our shared witness to the faithfulness of God, and to the peaceable kingdom to which the Most High calls us, is for the sake of healing the world.

**R. Sungenis:** There is nothing wrong with being in "dialogue and friendship with the Jewish people," but there is something seriously wrong with saying that Jews and Catholics have a "shared witness to the faithfulness of God and to the peaceable kingdom." The bishops seem to think that the Jewish rejection of Jesus Christ is really of no significant consequence. In their minds, the Jews can be a "witness to the faithfulness of God" even if they regard Jesus Christ, the central figure of God's faithfulness, as a fraud. This is a blatant contradiction.

Very simply, it all comes down to Jesus Christ. Most people in the world believe in God or some type of deity, but the real test is whether that person is willing to accept Jesus Christ as God in the flesh who died and rose again for our sins. Jews can believe in the "faithfulness of God" all they want, but it won't get them to heaven if they willingly reject Jesus Christ. If that is not so, then Jesus was a liar, and the whole discourse with the Jews in the Gospel of John, chapters 5-9, is also a lie. I suggest these five bishops reread that discourse and refresh their minds on the divine mission of Jesus Christ to the Jews.

In the end, these five bishops, and all the bishops, have to make a choice. Either they accept the Gospel for what it teaches about Jesus Christ and preach this by word and deed to the Jews at every reasonable opportunity, or, they can placate the Jews and suppress the Gospel as much as possible, reducing the Catholic faith to nothing more than spiritual platitudes and hearty handshakes.

The bishops need to talk less about "peaceable kingdoms" and "healing the world" and more about saving souls for eternity, for only in salvation through Jesus Christ is there peace with God (Romans 5:1). Those who seek to placate the enemy and forget the true mission of Christianity are similar to the Jews of the Old Covenant who had "dialogue" with the pagan nations and forged peace agreements. Read all about it in Jeremiah 23. God turned their illusion of peace into divine destruction. Although these bishops seem to think that the more they placate the Jews the

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more peace will come, it is precisely the opposite. Once the bishops compromise the Gospel, they now have God as their enemy, and in judgment he will take peace from the earth.

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