

More Confusion on Page 131

of the USCCB Catechism

Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

On August 5, 2008, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released the results of their national vote to revise page 131 of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* that was published in 2006. The statement on page 131 simply states: "**Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them.**" Needless to say, a face value reading of this statement teaches that the Mosaic covenant was never revoked, and thus the Jewish people, from the time of Christ to the present day, have their own covenant with God that is separate from the New Covenant. Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium have flatly contradicted the catechism's assertion.

Although the US bishops fulfilled their responsibilities before God by removing the erroneous statement from the catechism, two prominent non-bishops that influence the USCCB and its catechism, Monsignor David Malloy, General Secretary of the USCCB, and Father James Massa, executive director of the USCCB Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, (the latter of which stated in a recent inquiry that he was instrumental in having the statement on page 131 removed) revealed in a recent interview published by the *Catholic News Service* that they may not have exactly thrown in the towel on this issue. Malloy's and Massa's comments reveal that the excision and replacement on page 131 may be a case of 'six of one, and half a dozen of the other.' If so, the Catholic bishops were led into one gross error when the USCCB published the erroneous statement on page 131 in 2006, and are now being led into another quagmire by the words chosen for replacement.

Whoever the mysterious author of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is, he (or they) appear to be very crafty. Let's see how this may be the case.

http://www.usccb.org/stories/bishops_vote_catec.shtml

Bishops vote to revise U.S. catechism on Jewish covenant with God

By Nancy Frazier O'Brien

[Catholic News Service](#)

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The U.S. bishops have voted to ask the Vatican to approve a small change in the U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults to clarify church teaching on God's covenant with the Jewish people.

R. Sungenis: As most of my patrons know, Catholic Apologetics International Publishing, Inc., and its website subsidiary, Bellarmine Theological Forum, have been the premier critic on the national and international scene the last couple of years in pointing out the highly erroneous statement on page 131 of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. After CAI had suffered the denial of an imprimatur for the Catholic Apologetics Study Bible, *The Apocalypse of St. John* based in part on Bishop Kevin Rhoades siding with the USCCB catechism and its elevation of the validity of the Mosaic covenant for the Jews by specifically citing page 131 of the USCCB catechism in his denial, we had decided to write to the USCCB in order to get to the root of the problem. We received a return letter from Msgr. David Malloy on January 18, 2007 stating that he had no concern that the statement saying the Mosaic covenant was eternally valid for the Jews was unorthodox. Malloy was quite content to say that the USCCB catechism had received a "recognitio" from the Vatican:

“Your letter to me of December 12, 2006 concerning a passage in the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults has been received. Thank you for taking the time to send your observations. As you can well understand, the bishops of the United States are very committed to fulfilling their obligation to teach authentically the truths of the Catholic Faith in a manner that is both clear and consistent. To help insure that the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults assists the Bishops in that task, and in conformity with the prescriptions of the Code of Canon Law, after the text’s completion and approval by the bishops in their General Meeting, it was submitted to the Holy See for review and recognition. I am pleased that the Holy See has granted that recognition, as noted in each edition of the Catechism. With the hope that this information is helpful to you, I am Sincerely yours in Christ,
Monsignor David J. Malloy, General Secretary.”

Having received Malloy’s response, we then decided to write a lengthy letter in September 2007 to William Cardinal Levada, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, explaining the theological and biblical problems with the statement on page 131 of the USCCB catechism. In an October 11, 2007 letter, Cardinal Levada acknowledged our objections and implied that he and the Congregation were going to look into the matter. Whether the CDF contacted the USCCB, I do not know. The letter from Cardinal Levada’s secretary, Archbishop Amato, is posted on our website at:

<http://www.catholicintl.com/articles/Reply%20from%20Vatican%20to%20Robert%20Sungenis.pdf>

Lastly, the specter of the USCCB’s faulty catechism arose to new heights when Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Harrisburg had defended, in public, page 131’s

erroneous words. Bishop Rhoades' analysis and my response to his analysis are on our website at:

<http://www.catholicintl.com/articles/My%20Response%20to%20Bishop%20Rhoades%20Re%20Old%20Covenant.pdf>

To increase the alert to the public of our efforts, we also wrote a lengthy article in the January 2008 issue of *Culture Wars* against the USCCB's catechism's thesis that the Mosaic covenant remained valid for the Jews. The article is posted on our website at:

<http://www.catholicintl.com/articles/The%20Old%20Covenant%20Revoke%20or%20Not%20Revoked%20for%20Culture%20Wars.pdf>

At last resort, we were planning to bring a canonical lawsuit against the USCCB for its erroneous teaching and we were in the beginning stages as of this writing. We had already spoken to more than one canon lawyer about this matter. Fortunately, with the overwhelming vote by the USCCB to excise the erroneous statement on page 131, it looks as if we will not have to go that far. To my knowledge, we have been the only Catholic apostolate to pursue all these public and official avenues for the purpose of having the statement on page 131 of the USCCB's catechism repealed.

The *Catholic News Service* article continues:

CNS: The proposed change -- which would replace one sentence in the catechism -- was discussed by the bishops in executive session at their June meeting in Orlando, Fla., but did not receive the needed two-thirds majority of all members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at that time.

After mail balloting, the final vote of 231-14, with one abstention, was announced Aug. 5 in a letter to bishops from Msgr. David Malloy, USCCB general secretary.

R. Sungenis: This tells us, of course, that the decision to excise the erroneous statement was not a slam dunk. If in June 2008 two-thirds (or 66%) of the USCCB's bishops were not on board, it means that less than 162 bishops were in favor of excising the statement on page 131. What made the vote suddenly climb from less than 162 to 231 (or 93%) of bishops in favor of excising the statement is anyone's guess. Perhaps there were not enough of the bishops present during the executive session. Or, perhaps in the privacy of a mail-in ballot the bishops could not only think more clearly about the issue but could voice their opinion without any peer-pressure from fellow bishops giving them a jaundice eye in a public meeting.

CNS: The change, which must be confirmed by the Vatican Congregation for Clergy, would remove from the catechism a sentence that reads: "Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them."

Replacing it would be this sentence: "To the Jewish people, whom God first chose to hear his word, 'belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ'" (Rom 9:4-5; cf. CCC, No. 839).

R. Sungenis: In general, I usually don't have any problem replacing an erroneous theological statement with a sentence from Scripture. Unfortunately, however, the matter is not so simple in this case. My suspicion is that the unidentified author of the USCCB catechism chose Romans 9:4-5 because, if the uninformed reader gives it a cursory reading from certain English translations, he may be unduly influenced to believe that the Jews still have possession of all the items listed in the verse, including, perhaps, the Mosaic covenant. It just so happens that at least three of the items in verse 4 (i.e., "covenants," "law," and "worship") imply a reference to the Mosaic covenant. If it was the USCCB author's intention to imply a continuity

and validity to the Mosaic covenant by citing this suggestive text of Scripture (Romans 9:4-5) so as to give the impression that there is now a divine stamp of approval to the idea that today's Jews still possess the Mosaic covenant, then the USCCB's actions are a deceptive piece of propaganda, and our praise for the removal of the previous erroneous sentence must be severally muted. I am not accusing the catechism's author or editor of this motive; rather, I am only saying that IF this is their motive, then they are being unethical and doing a great disservice to the Catholic community in an apparent attempt to save face for themselves. I hope to God this is not their intention, but if it is, I am just as obligated, according to Canon Law 212, 2-3, to point out this subterfuge to the Christian faithful as I was obligated to point out the fallacious theological content of the original wording on page 131.

Let me elaborate. First, I find it rather suspicious that the authors chose not to use what has become the *ex officio* translation of the Catholic Church in America, the *New American Bible* (NAB). Perhaps the reason for bypassing the NAB is that it does not contain the word "belong" in Romans 9:4, the very word that implies the Jews still possess all the items listed in the verse. The NAB reads:

⁴ They are Israelites; **theirs the adoption**, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵ theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.

The NAB, at this point being a very accurate translation, does not have the word "belong" simply because it does not appear in the original Greek. The original Greek reads:

⁴ οἵτινες εἰσιν Ἰσραηλῖται, ᾧν ἡ υἰοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, ⁵ ᾧν οἱ πατέρες καὶ ἐξ ᾧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ

κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὧν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν.

Since there are no textual variants in this verse, we know precisely what St. Paul wrote and we can thus examine it without prejudice. The phrase in question is ὧν ἡ υἰοθεσία, (lit., “of whom the adoption”), since it is the introductory phrase that leads the remaining list of items in the verse. The problem for English translators is that neither the phrase in question nor the rest of the relative clause in verses 4-5 contains a verb. In other words, the verse does not say “of whom **belong** the adoption...the glory...the covenants” but literally “of whom the adoption...the glory...the covenants.” The word “belong,” which is a present tense verb added by some English translators, gives the impression to the uneducated reader that the “Israelites” (or Jews) presently possess these blessings because the blessings presently “belong” to them.¹ As it stands, without a verb in the secondary clause the translator really has no grammatical basis for making the verse imply that today’s Jews presently possess the Mosaic covenant or any of the other items in the list, a fact which the NAB was apparently very sensitive to. If one decides to add words to the passage, it could just as easily be translated in the past tense, e.g., “of whom **belonged** the adoption...the glory...the covenants,” which indicates that the Jews, once upon a time, possessed these blessings, but no longer do. As we will see, the past tense is chosen by many Catholic translations.

A survey of various popular bibles reveals that the translators were quite divided on their renderings of Romans 9:4. A good portion of Catholic and

¹ The only verb of the sentence appears in the main clause (“Who **are** Israelites”) the object of which the new edition of the USCCB will refer to as “The Jewish people,” a seeming attempt to further distance the Jews from the past and make them closer to the present, since the “Israelites” under Moses were not called “Jews.” The word “Jew” does not appear until 2Kings 25:25 in the RSV, almost a thousand years after Moses.

Protestant bibles treated Romans 9:4 as referring to the past, yet a majority of Protestant bibles treated it as a present.

Catholic Bibles:

- Past Tense:
New Jerusalem Bible: "They are Israelites; it was they who were adopted as children, the glory was theirs..."
- Past Tense:
Jerusalem Bible: "My brothers of Israel...they were adopted as sons, they were given the glory and the covenants..."
- Neutral:
New American Bible: "They are Israelites; theirs the adoption, the glory,"
- Present Tense:
Douay Rheims: "Who are Israelites: to whom belongeth the adoption"

Protestant Bibles:

- Neutral:
King James Version: "Who are Israelites; to whom *pertaineth* the adoption, and the glory"
- Present Tense:
American Standard: "who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, and the glory,"
- Present Tense:
New American Standard: "who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons"
- Present Tense:
New International Version: "the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory"
- Present Tense:
New Revised Standard: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory"
- Present Tense:
Revised Standard Version: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory"
- Past and Present Tense:
New English Bible: "They are Israelites: they were made God's sons; theirs is the splendor of the divine presence."

There are several points at issue regarding these translations:

First and foremost is the fact that even though an English translation may render the verse as an implied present tense, in the Greek language, a present tense verb does not necessarily mean that the action is occurring in the present time. A very common Greek present is the “historical present.” The Greek author would use a present tense verb but apply it to past time. In other words, the use of a present tense verb, even if only implied in the Greek, does not inevitably mean that the verse is teaching that the subject matter is applicable to the present day, but only that the author wants us to realize that, in the past, the subject matter was a present reality. The problem for the English reader, however, is that he doesn’t always know when the Greek is using an “historical present,” unless, perhaps, he figures it out by the context of the passage. The bottom line is this: even if the English translator supplies a present tense verb for a Greek sentence, the Greek, either because there really is no verb in the sentence, or because a Greek present tense doesn’t always point to the present, there is no basis for interpreting Romans 9:4-5 as applying to the present (namely, that the Jews still possess the “covenants,” “law” and “worship” of the Old Testament).

Second, since the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* uses the 1946 Protestant Revised Standard Version (RSV) in all its quotes from Scripture, it translates Romans 9:4 as noted above: “To the Jews ‘belong the sonship, the glory...” (CCC ¶839). Hence, it is the same RSV translation that is now being proposed for Romans 9:4-5 on page 131 in the future edition of the USCCB catechism. Now, to be technical, some astute person would point out that the 1994 Vatican Catechism and the next edition of the USCCB catechism are really using the *Catholic edition* of the Protestant RSV, since Catholic editors revised some of its translations. But the reality is that the Catholic editors of the 1946 RSV accepted all 433 verses from the Protestant translators for the book of Romans, except four verses (Romans 1:4; 5:5; 8:11; 9:5, the last of which was changed to: “Christ, who is God over all, be blessed forever” from the RSV’s “Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever”). Hence, the verse

appearing in the 1994 Vatican Catechism for Romans 9:4 is the original translation from the 1946 Protestant Revised Standard Version. This has its own set of problems, as we will see below.

Third, most of the Protestant translations around the turn of the twentieth century, including the Revised Standard Version of 1946, were heavily influenced by Dispensationalism, Millennialism and various other strains of thought that were promoting a political and spiritual revival for Israel and the Jews. The tendency among these bibles was to slant the translation to be more favorable to that ideology.² Often when there was an ambiguity in the Greek or Hebrew, these particular translators would take full advantage of it for their ideological cause. Conversely, the fairest and most accurate way of translating these types of passages is to give them a literal, word-for-word reading from the Greek, but if it is necessary to add a word or two to make the text easier for English readers, the translator should provide a footnote to alert the reader to that addition (or as the King James does, the translator should put the added word in italic font). As it stands, with most translations that render Romans 9:4 as a present tense, few explain that they are either adding words (e.g., “belong”) or that the Greek has an “historical present,” or any nuance of the Greek language. Hence, the English reader may naturally think that if the verse says “They are Israelites. To them belong the adoption...glory...covenants” that the Jews presently possess the Mosaic covenant and all the other blessings listed in the verse.

In reality, there is a very good reason why St. Paul excluded a verb from the secondary clause of Romans 9:4. If the verb is deliberately left out, the intention (which agrees with the context of Romans 9) is not to say that the Jews presently possess the Mosaic covenant, but to show that they possessed it only in the past. If we examine the items closely, we see that they are

² Of the many examples, the RSV’s translation of Romans 3:2 as: “...the Jews are entrusted with the oracles of God” changes the Greek aorist (past) tense of ἐπιστεύθησαν to the present tense “are entrusted” in place of the correct translation “were entrusted.”

identity markers, seven of them (with an eighth added in reference to Christ), each one identifying what, precisely, it was that made one an “Israelite.” Specific applications from the OT are as follows:

1. “sonship” (Ex 4:22-23; 19:5; Hs 11:1)
2. “glory” (Ex 40:34; Lv 16:2)
3. “covenants” (Gn 17-31; Ex 6, *et al.*)
4. “law” (Ex 20; Dt 5, 28)
5. “worship” (Ex 23-34; Lv 1-27)
6. “promises” (Gn 12-26; Is 53; Ez 36-37, *et al.*)
7. “fathers” (Gn 12-28)
8. “Christ” (Acts 2-4)³

Again, Paul’s purpose is simple. As he introduces Romans 9:4 with the fact that the people of the Old Testament carry the name “Israelites” (as was the case in Moses’ day), he then follows with seven specific descriptions of what originally identified them as Israelites in the Old Testament.

Now, if someone attempts to make these items apply to the Jews in our time, a serious theological problem is created, for it would require, for example, that the Mosaic covenant (which Paul refers to in Romans 9:4 as “the giving of the law”) should have continued in its totality into our day and never ceased, including all the “eye for an eye” laws (Ex 21:24); stoning for adultery (Dt 22:13f); rejection for castration (Dt 23:1), *etc.* Likewise, all the ceremonial laws (which Paul refers to in Romans 9:4 as “the worship”) should have continued unabated in our day, including mandatory circumcision, the temple cult, *etc.* Is this not what religious Jews do today, all the while that they reject Christ and Christianity? The most egregious crime, of course, would be that committed by the Catholic Church, since she

³ Christ is the eighth and the beginning of a new seven. The “Israelites” are thus identified as the Christ-bearers, that is, the nation from which Christ originated.

apparently ignored the continuity of the Old Testament legal stipulations listed in Romans 9:4-5 for the last 2000 years.

If the continuity of the Mosaic covenant is not St. Paul's intent, then what is? The Greek grammar (without the use of a verb to specify time) means that these eight items merely **originated** from the Jews, not that the Jews of today still legally possess them as if they were never taken away. This meaning is proven by the fact that the last item in Romans 9:4-5, "Christ according to the flesh," is also missing a verb, thus following the same syntactical pattern Paul established in the beginning of verse 4. As such, we can use the last phrase to know precisely the intent of the previous phrases. Obviously, the Jews at large do not possess Christ presently, since the whole point of Romans 9-11 is to show how obstinate the Jews have been against Christ and that only a remnant have accepted Him at any given time in history (Romans 10:16-21; 11:1-8). The phrase "Christ according to the flesh" is New Testament terminology used often to demonstrate that Christ's flesh came from the flesh of Israelites, and therefore Christ was as genuine an Israelite savior as there could be, fulfilling the Davidic line of descent. Again, the purpose of the Greek syntax and word choice is to show that Christ originated from the Jews, not that the Jews possess Christ presently. Logically, they cannot "possess" Christ unless they believe in him. And logically, the Jews do not presently possess the other seven items listed in the verses.

If the above analysis were not the case, then St. Paul would be clearly contradicting himself, for he said in other passages that the "giving of the law" and "the worship" were superseded by the New Covenant (*cf.* Heb 7:18; 10:9; 2Cor 3:6-14; Gal 3:10-12; 5:1-4; Col 2:15-16). In fact, the supersession of the Mosaic covenant is the very reason that all the civil and ceremonial laws of Israel have been replaced by the canons and sacraments of the Catholic Church.

All in all, if the author of the USCCB catechism is quoting Romans 9:4-5 for the purpose of secretly installing a “proof-text” for the catechism’s previous view that the “Mosaic covenant is eternally valid for the Jews,” then the author has been quite deceptive and thus he has only exacerbated the problem that he began in the previous edition of the catechism published in 2006.

If, on the other hand, the catechism has made a concerted effort to rectify its previous error and is not implying (by its quoting Romans 9:4-5) that today’s Jews still have possession of the Mosaic covenant and all its trappings, then I applaud them for their efforts. However, a footnote stating that the quoting of Romans 9:4-5 is not for the purpose of saying that the Jews presently possess the Mosaic law should have been added, especially in light of the fact that the USCCB, by its own admission, has already been caught putting a totally erroneous statement on the same page of its previous edition. After all that has happened, readers certainly have the right to be suspicious of the USCCB catechism’s intent and competence.

But it remains to be seen which of these two motives was behind the recent change in the USCCB’s catechism. If the former motive is the reality, it may explain why everyone suddenly became so agreeable to make the change, for in the opinion of many of its ideologues, nothing doctrinal has really changed except that, by quoting a passage of Scripture (Romans 9:4-5), an impression of divine approval has now been stamped onto the previous belief about the Mosaic covenant remaining valid for the Jews. That very impression is suggested by some of the comments made by Fr. James Massa which he stated in his interview with the *Catholic News Service*, as we shall see.

CNS: "Talking points" distributed to the bishops along with Msgr. Malloy's letter said the proposed revision "is not a change in the church's teaching."

"Catholics understand that all previous covenants that God made with the Jewish people have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ through the new covenant established through his sacrificial death on the cross," the talking points say.

"The prior version of the text," they continue, "might be understood to imply that one of the former covenants imparts salvation without the mediation of Christ, whom Christians believe to be the universal savior of all people."

R. Sungenis: Here we have another problem. Msgr. Malloy seems to be implying (as Bishop Rhoades did in his public interview on this subject, noted above) that the Mosaic covenant could impart salvation to today's Jews as long as it is not "without the mediation of Christ." If that is Msgr. Malloy's meaning and intent, it is erroneous. In fact, it is just as erroneous as the USCCB catechism's previous attempt to say that the Jews have an eternally valid covenant with Moses. As I said in my response to Bishop Rhoades, he and his colleagues need to make a clear and unambiguous statement that the Mosaic covenant is completely revoked and no longer valid for the Jews. They also need to admit that, whether the Mosaic covenant is seen as being in connection with the mediation of Christ or not, it cannot save the Jews, just as it could not save them in the past. If they don't do so, then they are merely causing more confusion and exacerbating the problem instead of fixing it.

CNS: Father James Massa, executive director of the USCCB Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, told Catholic News Service Aug. 11 that he did not "anticipate any tensions in the relationship" between Catholics and Jews as long as the proposed change is properly understood as arising from a need to "remove ambiguity" in the catechism.

"The catechism is not the place where you work out difficult theological problems," he said. "That's what scholars are charged to do."

R. Sungenis: Fr. James Massa is the USCCB representative that met with me at the office of Bishop Rhoades back in July 2007. He was a very pleasant priest and we had a good conversation. Unfortunately, if what Msgr. Malloy said above (“one of the former covenants imparts salvation without the mediation of Christ”) is the motive behind why the catechism’s words were changed on page 131, then all that has happened is that another “ambiguity” has been created, and one that perhaps is more insidious than the first, since it seems to give legitimacy to the Mosaic covenant, provided that the Mosaic covenant is under the umbrella of Christ.

As for Fr. Massa’s statement that the catechism is not where one works out theological problems, we can certainly agree. By the same token, the catechism is not the place where scholars are permitted to create theological problems, as was foisted on the 2006 version of page 131. But now, although the USCCB has decided to quote Scripture as a replacement of its previous error on page 131, this is, unfortunately, no guarantee that the right concept will be implanted in the reader’s mind, for, as the Catholic Church well knows in confronting the myriad of non-Catholic denominations in the world, everyone has their own interpretation of what Scripture means, and some verses, as Peter says of Paul’s writings, are “hard to understand and the unstable wrestle with them to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16). Instead of quoting an unexegeted and uncontextualized passage of Scripture on page 131, the USCCB author should leave well enough alone. The excision of the erroneous statement (“Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them”) was sufficient without trying to cover it over with a difficult and ambiguous passage of Scripture, namely, Romans 9:4. By the same token, if the author of the catechism is so keen on quoting Scripture, why didn’t he quote, much less teach, anywhere in his catechism the numerous passages in the New Testament that are crystal clear about the revocation of the Mosaic covenant,

such as Hebrews 7:18; 8:1-13; 10:9; 2Corinthians 3:6-14; Colossians 2:14-15; Ephesians 2:15?

CNS: Father Massa said the status of the Jewish covenant has been "a very fertile area for theological investigation" in recent years, although church teaching has been clear on two related points:

- The Jewish people "are in a real relationship with God based on a covenant that has never been revoked."
- "All covenants with Israel find fulfillment in Christ, who is the savior of all."

R. Sungenis: It seems, once again, Fr. Massa is trying to capitalize on ambiguity. Notice his words. He says: "based on a covenant that has never been revoked" (emphasis mine), but he does not alert the reader to the precise identity of whatever covenant he has in view. This is the same shell game that many others have been playing with these covenants for the last few years. According to Fr. Massa, there is "a" covenant still possessed by today's Jews that their fellow Jews possessed in the Old Testament, and this perpetual covenant presently gives the Jews, *en masse*, a "real relationship with God." All Jews today (at least the religious ones) are apparently active members of this covenant, not potential members. But the only covenants that the Jews had in the Old Testament, *en masse*, were the covenant of circumcision beginning with Abraham and the legal covenant beginning with Moses. All Jews were included in these covenants, whether they wanted to be included or not (otherwise they would have been cut off from the Israelite community). So which of those two is Fr. Massa referring to? He doesn't tell us, and I believe there is a good reason for his silence. The ploy, it seems to me, is to be deliberately ambiguous about which covenant is in view so that no one can pinpoint its identity and neutralize Fr. Massa's appeal to a perpetual covenant for the Jews. It seems that Fr. Massa wants to create a

sort of quasi-covenant, a noosphere of covenant (to borrow a term from de Chardin) that just hovers over the Jews like some gigantic spiritual and ethereal cloud, but one that is undefined and unidentified.

In the 2006 edition of the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, Fr. Massa and the catechism's author had no problem telling us what covenant they would like to see fit the category of creating a "real relationship with God that has never been revoked." It was the Mosaic covenant, stated clearly and plainly on page 131 of their catechism ("Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them"). Note that "eternally valid" is just another way of saying "never been revoked." But since the USCCB discovered that their wording was erroneous, Fr. Massa now switches back to promoting "a" covenant and purposely avoids telling us what covenant he has in view. This was the same problem I had with Dr. Eugene Fisher (another non-bishop of the USCCB) in our discussions last year about the nature of the covenant. Dr. Fisher kept insisting that the Jews have their own covenant. When I asked him for the identity of that covenant, Dr. Fisher abruptly closed the discussion.

Second, the Bible nowhere says that "The Jewish people are in a 'real relationship with God based on a covenant that has never been revoked.'" The only thing the Bible says about a "revoking" in regards to the Jews is that the "gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (or unrepentable)" (Romans 11:29), not that the covenants God established exclusively with the Jews, *en masse*, are irrevocable. In other words, God has never revoked his gift and call of salvation for the Jews, since that is the whole thrust of St. Paul's teaching in Romans 9-11 – that the Jews can still be saved, if they will repent and accept Christ (Romans 11:14, 23). But since there is only one legal covenant today, the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, what covenant could the Jews possibly possess that will give them a "real relationship with God" other than the New Covenant? Instead of admitting this, Fr. Massa is once again

trying to muddy the waters by suggesting that there is “a” covenant somewhere out there that the Jews continue to have apart from Christianity. What covenant is that, Fr. Massa? There are only two covenants left: (a) the Mosaic covenant and (b) the Abrahamic covenant. Fr. Massa has already admitted that it cannot be the Mosaic covenant since he led the excision of the faulty sentence from page 131 of the catechism, so that leaves the Abrahamic covenant. But the Abrahamic covenant of circumcision was clearly abrogated, so says that Council of Florence (Denzinger ¶695). That means that any Jew who is practicing circumcision today as part of his religious obligation to God is condemned by the Catholic Church.

So what does that leave us? It leaves us with precisely what I stated in my *Culture Wars* article – the spiritual dimension of Abraham’s covenant, which is precisely what the Catholic Church has taught in its dogmatic tradition. This is the covenant that saves Jews and Gentiles, but neither the Jews nor the Gentiles can be a part of it unless they believe as Abraham believed, and today, that means accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as Abraham and Moses would have done (cf. John 8:56; Hb 11:26). This was the covenant that divided Jew from Jew, because only those Jews who had a genuine faith-relationship with God and confessed their sins could ever reap the benefits of that covenant (Romans 3:28-4:12). That is why Paul says in Romans 9:6: “For they are not all Israel who are from Israel.” When Christ came, the spiritual side of the Abrahamic covenant became the New Covenant, and Jews and Gentiles are presently being saved in that very covenant (cf. Romans 4:1-24; Gal 3:6-29; Hebrews 10:16-18; 2 Corinthians 3:6-18).

But the difference between Abraham’s physical covenant of circumcision and the spiritual covenant of salvation is that all the Jews were part of the former, but only those who believed as God required them to believe were part of the latter. In the same way, all those Jews today who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are part of Abraham’s spiritual covenant. Those who disbelieve

are not members of that covenant. The crucial point is: the covenant that is perpetual does not apply to ALL Jews. It only applies to believing Jews, Jews who believe in Jesus Christ, the God of Abraham (Gal 3:29). Practically speaking, most Jews (since they do not believe in Jesus Christ) are not members of Abraham's spiritual covenant, and they have no other covenant that can bring them to God, for there is only one name under heaven by which men can be saved, Jesus Christ. So, it would behoove Fr. Massa to stop teaching that the Jews, *en masse* or *at large*, have "a" covenant with God, and that because of this covenant they possess some innate distinction apart from Gentiles or that they possess some spiritual status with God that Gentiles don't have. There is no such covenant, for there is no Jew or Gentile in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28).

CNS: Father Massa added that the current wording in the catechism "was not flat-out wrong" but "was ambiguous and needed to be qualified."

R. Sungenis: We see, once again, what Fr. Massa seems to be hankering for. Two-thirds of the bishops told him to excise the erroneous statement from page 131 of the catechism, but Fr. Massa appears to be saving face for himself and his like-minded theologians by saying that the sentence in question wasn't "flat out wrong," implying that there was some truth, howbeit ever so small, to the idea that the Mosaic covenant is still valid for the Jews! In other words, Fr. Massa still believes the Jews possess the Mosaic covenant today, and he only needed a clearer statement, this time supposedly from the Bible itself (i.e., Romans 9:4-5), to shore up that belief. But the stark reality is, there is no truth to the statement on page 131, in addition to the fact that the statement was not "ambiguous." The USCCB catechism plainly and clearly stated that the Mosaic covenant was still valid for the Jews (which, if anything, is a "flat out" heresy, since it contradicts the Magisterium, Tradition and Scripture). Moreover, the previous sentence in the catechism, because it

was followed immediately by the word “Thus” in the second sentence, implied that it was through the Mosaic covenant that the Jews could still receive salvation! (“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”). If this matter ever went to trial, the author of the catechism could have been convicted of heresy. That’s how serious this matter is.

CNS: But because the catechism is an educational tool and not a theological textbook, the bishops decided not to expand that section to provide a fuller consideration of the issue, he said.

R. Sungenis: So what happened, then, is that an unexegeted and uncontextualized verse of Scripture, namely, Romans 9:4-5, was put in the place of the previous erroneous statement, and the author of the catechism may have deliberately chosen a translation other than the NAB, all for the purpose of saying that, if the Jews still possess the Mosaic covenant, it is “not flat out wrong,” just “ambiguous.” If Romans 9:4-5 had been properly translated and exegeted, there would be no suggestion that the Jews still possess and are inevitably sanctified, *en masse*, by “a” covenant that originated in the Old Testament.

CNS: He also stressed the Catholic teaching that it is “never permissible to impose our faith on others.”

R. Sungenis: That depends on what one means by “impose.” If Fr. Massa is speaking about forcing our faith on someone against his free will to reject it, then he is correct. But if the word “impose” is intending to mean that we

should refrain from preaching the Gospel to receptive individuals who are members of a larger group who have rejected the Gospel (e.g., the Jews), then Fr. Massa is incorrect.

CNS: Although some Jews as individuals may choose to become Christians, "it is also the church's understanding that the full incorporation of Israel into the saving covenant of Christ may be the fruit of the end times, may not happen until the end of history," Father Massa said.

R. Sungenis: Now Fr. Massa speaks about the "saving covenant of Christ" in which the Jews may be fully incorporated in the future. This necessarily means that the "a" covenant Fr. Massa referred to earlier as the covenant which provides a "real relationship with God based on a covenant that has never been revoked," is not the saving covenant of Christ. For if all Jews are under the "covenant that has never been revoked," yet only some are incorporated into the "saving covenant of Christ," then obviously we are talking about two different covenants that have two different results, yet both are said to have the same duration (i.e., never revoked), hence, it appears the Fr. Massa is still teaching dual covenant theology.

As for the claim that it is the "church's understanding that the full incorporation of Israel into the saving covenant may be the fruit of the end times," the operative word here is "may," since the "church" certainly doesn't hold as dogma, or even official teaching, that the Jews will have a "full incorporation" into Christ. The 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶674, certainly is not definitive about such an outcome, since it only strings together quotes from Chapter 11 of Paul's letter to the Romans without exegeting them. The 1994 Catechism could just as well be teaching that the "full incorporation of Israel" is occurring presently as the Gospel goes forth to all the Jews and Gentiles of the world, and those Jews from Abraham to

Christ's Second Coming who accept the Gospel will represent the "full incorporation" of the Jews into the saving covenant.

More importantly, and please take notice well of this, since Fr. Massa holds to the idea of a future "full incorporation" of the Jews into the "saving covenant," he not only admits that the Mosaic covenant is non-salvific, but this thesis also leads him to believe that, if the Jews are going to accept the Gospel only in the future, then we cannot expect them to accept the Gospel in our present day, and therefore we are not required to avidly preach the Gospel to them today. This is the whole thesis behind Cardinal Keeler's *Reflections on Covenant and Missions* document that he forged with Jewish rabbis in 2002. This erroneous thinking leads them to believe that since the Jews are not expected to receive Christ in our present day, then they should not be "targeted" with the Gospel today. This same mentality leads Fr. Massa to believe that, in the interim period before the end of time, the Jews, *en masse*, can enjoy some kind of quasi-relationship with God based on their former covenants in the Old Testament, as if these covenants create some kind of spiritual holding-pattern for the Jews while God prepares them for the full-blown covenant in Jesus Christ. This is the same idea that Jewish convert Roy Schoeman tries to establish in his book *Salvation is from the Jews*. The entire idea is false and destructive. The Jews are no more privileged than anyone else in the world who has not accepted Christ as the savior. Their anti-Christian religions are not going to benefit them in the least. In fact, the idea that the Jews are in some kind of holding pattern until the end of time is precisely what the devil would want for them, because without the Gospel being preached to them, it consigns all the Jews of today to a life without salvation in Jesus Christ, leading ultimately to the damnation of their souls. This is precisely why having the correct doctrine is so important, since false doctrine ultimately leads to damnation.

CNS: In his letter to bishops, Msgr. Malloy said that if the Congregation for Clergy grants "recognitio," or approval, to the revised passage it will be incorporated into the next printing of the U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults.

"The next printing will not occur until the remaining volumes from the latest printing are exhausted," he added.

Adopted by the U.S. bishops in November 2004 and later approved by the Vatican, the 664-page adult catechism is the first official catechism produced by the nation's bishops since the creation of the Baltimore Catechism, first published in 1885 and revised in 1941.

In the first two weeks after its July 31, 2006, publication, it sold more than 25,000 copies, according to USCCB Publishing.

Therese Brown, associate director for marketing, sales and service at USCCB Publishing, said about 190,000 copies of the adult catechism had been sold to date. Another printing of 50,000 copies took place in May and those copies are expected to run out around the middle of next year, she said.

R. Sungenis: At this point, the USCCB is obligated to issue an official retraction and apology on its website and make every effort to let the public know that the reason the statement from page 131 was summarily excised out of its catechism was that it was totally erroneous, or, readjusting Fr. Massa's words, the statement on page 131 was "flat out wrong." As it stands, although the USCCB's removal of the erroneous statement is much appreciated, considering the comments made by both Msgr. Malloy and Fr. Massa, I am quite leery that the same erroneous mentality about the Jews still persists in the thinking of these men, and that the addition of Romans 9:4-5 into page 131 was for the purpose of making it appear as if, somehow, the Jews still possess their old covenant, but this time the catechism has stamped it with divine approval from the pen of St. Paul. Nothing could be further

from the truth for St. Paul. The USCCB has an obligation to teach, clearly and distinctly, that the Jews do not possess any individual covenant with God, whether it be with Moses, Abraham or David, for all those covenants have either been abrogated or have transitioned into the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, respectively. If the Jew does not accept Christ, then he possesses no covenant that gives him a “real relationship with God.”

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For any comments or questions, please forward them to cairomeo@aol.com