Robert Sungenis responds

A person in this dialogue charged the Catholic Catechism with heresy based on the wording of Paragraph 121 regarding the Old Covenant.

Paragraph 121 reads: "The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanant value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked."

George: Friends, you may not have seen this before, but it's actually printed in the New Catechism:

Paragraph 121: "The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value,[92] for ***the Old Covenant has never been revoked.***"

If that's not heresy, what is?

R. Sungenis: It's ambiguous, but it's not heresy. Para 121 is simply equating the Old Covenant with the Old Testament scriptures, not the legal system of Old Covenant law. It is Scripture that is "divinely inspired" and "retains a permanent value," since, as St. Paul says in 1 Cor 10:6, 11, the OT was written as an example to us not to fall into the same sins as did Israel.

Steve: No, it's heresy. Words mean things, and the CCC is clearly using heretical words: "the Old Covenant has never been revoked."

There's no equation here with the Old Testament, otherwise:

1) They would have used the same words ("The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value,[92] for the Old TESTAMENT has never been revoked.")

2) They wouldn't have used the word "for" ("The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value,[92] FOR [because, since, for the reason that] the Old TESTAMENT has never been revoked.")

3) They would be stating a truism. No one doubts that the Old Testament has been "revoked," and never has such a thing been suggested. What then is the value of saying, "Oh by the way the Old Testament books have never been revoked." Clearly, they are saying that the Old Testament books "retain a permanent value" PRECISELY BECAUSE ("for") "the Old Covenant has never been revoked."

Anyway you slice that, it's heresy.

Or else words have no meaning.

R. Sungenis: I understand what you are saying. Words do have meaning. But I think you are "reading into" the words a meaning that you have been preconditioned to see by some misusage of the clause by the pope and Cardinal Keeler. Let's look at what the words mean from the Catechism's perspective.

First, there is no elaboration in the Catechism of the idea that the Old Covenant has not been revoked. The Catechism simply makes an unqualified statement in Para 121, with no definition other than what is contained in Para 121. Without that definition, then the clause cannot mean anything other than that the Old Testament scriptures can still be used today, for that is the context of the Catechism's statements (regardless of how the pope has used the clause).

Moreover, since Para 121 is the only time the clause "for the Old Covenant has never been revoked" is used in the Catechism, thus, you are without support for the idea that it refers to anything other than the OT Scriptures. The Catechism must be the final context on the meaning of its own words.

Second, Para 122 confirms that the Catechism is focusing on the OT Scriptures and the valuable information they contain, since it says:

"Indeed, the economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so oriented that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ, remeemer of all men. Even though they contained matters imperfect and provisional, the books of the Old Testament bear witness to the whole divine pedagogy of God's saving love: these writings are a storehouse of sublime teaching on God and of sound wisdom on human life, as well as a wonderful treasury of prayers; in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way."

The focus here is on the WRITINGS of the Old Covenant, not on the Old Covenant as a legal entity to which we are bound.

Third, Para 123 also confirms that the Catechism is referring to OT Scripture, not to the Old Covenant as a binding legal entity. It says: "Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the new has rendered it void (Marcionism)."

It it clear from other parts of the Catechism it recognizes that the legal system of the Old Covenant is condemnatory and thus had to be superseded by the New Covenant, which alone is salvific (Para 1963, 66), but not the Old Testament itself, since the Old Testament contains valuable ethical principles and prophetic predictions that have not as yet been fulfilled or are presently being fulfilled (Para 1962, 1964; Daniel 10-12; Zechariah 14; Ezekiel 40-48). As St. Paul says in Romans 7:6-12, the Old Testament "law is holy and good," but it is also the very thing that condemns him in sin. We take what is holy and good from the Old Testament, but leave the rest. That is all the Catechism is saying.

George: I agree with Edward. There's no way out for them this time. It is plain and simple heresy. Besides, how much sense does it make to say that the Old Testament has not been revoked? How can one possibly "revoke" divinely inspired books?

R. Sungenis: That's exactly the point. There were people who were actually doing just that, that is, saying that the Old Testament Scriptures were irrelevant and void (e.g., Marcion). A whole heresy developed around Marcion because of his error.

George: There is simply no reason whatsoever to suppose that "Old Covenant" here means "Old Testament [canon]," esp. not since the very phrase "Old Testament" is used in that same paragraph.

R. Sungenis: "No reason whatsoever"? How about the SIX times the Catechism refers to nothing but the "Old Testament" in the very paragraphs under discussion, and give absolutely no other meaning to the clause "the Old Covenant has not been revoked" in the entire Catechism, other than what it says in Para 121-123? END

George: Secondly, the Catechism here provides no citation, no reference, no backup whatsoever for its statement, NOT EVEN Vatican II! If it meant that the Old Testament books are simply still considered inspired, then why not cite Trent or something?

R. Sungenis: It doesn't have to, because it is not teaching something different than what was taught before about the value of the Old Testament.

In fact, there is really no difference between the word "Testament" and "Covenant," since they come from the same Hebrew, Greek and Latin words (e.g., berith, diatheke, and testamentum, respectively). This may be a simple case of the English translation making a distinction where there is none in the French, and certainly none in the Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

Moreover, the Catechism was written long before the clause "the OT has not been revoked" has been misused by the pope and the cardinals. So don't be so ready to condemn it without proper justification. Granted, it might have been better for the English translators to avoid the word "covenant," but that doesn't mean you have to condemn them automatically for doing so. END

Steve: Now you're suggesting that the New CCC, in this section on Revelation through Scripture, is concerned with Marcion and his heresies?

That's a stretch.

R. Sungenis: Why is it a "stretch" when the Catechism itself, in Para 123, states that Marcionism is the issue it is addressing?

Steve: You wrote: "In fact, there is really no difference between the word "Testament" and "Covenant," since they come from the same Hebrew, Greek and Latin words. This may be a simple case of the English translation making a distinction where there is none in the French, and certainly none in the Hebrew, Greek and Latin."

But the Latin runs thus: Vetus Testamentum [Old Testament] inamissibilis est pars sacrae Scripturae. Eius libri divinitus sunt inspirati et valorem servant permanentem, 119 quia Foedus Vetus [Old Covenant] nunquam est retractatum.

So even in the Latin, they've deliberately used two different words. The onus is on you to show that this deliberate word-shift is insignificant.

R. Sungenis: No difference, since in Latin the words are interchangeable. *Foedus* was the normal word used in the OT Scriptures, whereas
testamentum
was the normal word used in the NT Scriptures. This is verified by the fact that Jerome never uses foedus in the NT, but always used testamentum in the NT. Jerome further shows us the similarity when he translates Jer 31:31 with
foedus
, but its quote in Hebrews 8:10 with
testamentum
.

Steve: You wrote: "Moreover, the Catechism was written long before the clause "the OT has not been revoked" has been misused by the pope and the cardinals."

Nonetheless, the same pope who said "the OC has never been revoked" AFTER the CCC was released, is the same pope who (with all of his decades-old ideas about the OC, ideas he's harbored since the 50s and 60s) who said this CCC was a "sure norm" for teaching the faith.

No wonder.

R. Sungenis: We're not talking that issue. We're only talking about whether you can prove that Para 121 is teaching heresy.

Steve: Now, the problem you have is that, according to your interpretation of the CCC, what they're saying is this:

"The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value," Why? Why do they retain a permanent value? "for the Old Covenant (testament) has never been revoked."

That makes no sense. "The old testament writings are valuable because they have never been revoked." No, that's hardly intellectually honest.

R. Sungenis: Not if you pay attention to the context the Catechism is putting the words. There is absolutely no mention in Para 121-123, nor any other part of the Catechism, that the Catechism desires to teach what you are saying it means by "the OC has never been revoked." If you can find such a statement in the Catechism, then you have a case, but until then, one can easily say you're just reading into the passage what you want to see.

Steve: What does make sense is to say "The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value," Why? "for the Old Covenant (which the Old Testament describes in detail) has never been revoked."

That's the only interpretation that makes sense. The Old Writings retain their value because their subject matter is still valid.

R. Sungenis: Sorry, it's not the "only" interpretation that makes sense, especially since foedus and testamentum are interchangeable terms, and especially since there is no teaching in the Catechism that supports your interpretation of its own words.

George: Wait a minute... the Pope's statement "the old Covenant has never been revoked" was made about a decade BEFORE the New Catechism came out!

R. Sungenis: Not that I know of. I'm referring to his most recent statement, given about a year ago.

George: Interestingly, in his previous encyclicals, John Paul II says very clearly that the Old Covenant has been revoked and that the Eternal Covenant has been established in its place. I have the quotes if you would like to see them.

So at best, he is giving us a confusing picture of the issue.

Robert, can you provide one piece of evidence in the New Catechism that says the Old Covenant is over and done with? All I found was "refined, fulfilled," etc. but not that it is no longer in force.

R. Sungenis: It doesn't use the words "over and done with" but it does say that the New Covenant replaced the Old, and that the Old Covenant had its purpose in condemning men in sin, but that grace came by the New Covenant. The paragraphs that teach these concepts are 522, 762, 1963-1964 (and quote 1828 on 1964).

On the other hand, I no of no place where the Catechism says the Old Covenant is still in legal force as it was in Old Testament times.

George: Robert, why in the world does it use two different terms to describe the same concept? If it uses "Old Testament" [Vetus Testamentum] throughout, why all of a sudden "Old Covenant" [Foedus Vetus] in that one phrase, if it means the same as "Old Testament"?

R. Sungenis: As I wrote to Steve, they are not really "two different terms," since the words are completely interchangeable.

George: You wrote: "It doesn't have to, because it is not teaching something different than what was taught before about the value of the Old Testament."

Robert, you're missing the point. Of course it doesn't HAVE to, but why wouldn't it? Why wouldn't they provide a citation to Trent or some other council if they were just trying to say that the Old Testament books were still valid? Why not say "Old Testament" if you mean "Old Testament", esp. if that's what you say throughout?

R. Sungenis: It wouldn't for the simple fact that is not saying that the legal entity of the Mosaic dispensation is still in force. Conversely, when the Catechism DOES refer to Trent in on this topic, it says: "The Council of Trent teaches that the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians and that the justified man is still bound to keep them (DS 1569-1570). Para 2068.

George: You wrote: "This may be a simple case of the English translation making a distinction."

Nope, the Latin edition uses two terms as well.

R. Sungenis: As I said, it does because the words are interchangeable in Latin.

George: I've yet have to see a single example where a priest or other cleric in good standing uses the term "Old Covenant" in reference to the books of the Old Testament.

R. Sungenis: That's because today we normally don't use the word "covenant" but "testament," but it someone does use "covenant," the burden of proof is on you to show that they are saying that the Old Covenant, as the legal and condemnatory entity it was in the OT, is still the same today. The Catechism certainly doesn't say that, and therefore your charges of heresy are misplaced.

Steve: You wrote: "Why is it a "stretch" when the Catechism itself, in Para 123, states that Marcionism is the issue it is addressing?"

Point conceded.

However, 123 proves what I'm saying about 121, and their use of the word "for."

123 Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void (Marcionism).

Thus, the Chuch rejects the idea that the New Testament voids out the Old Testament.

Why would anyone get that idea? Perhaps because the New Covenant voided out the Old Covenant? Might that be what leads to the confusion that, since the NC voided the OC, thus the NT voids the OT?

And so again, the response in 121 is very telling. Why is the OT still valid?

"for the Old Covenant has never been revoked."

If the OC has never been revoked, then this would serve as a proof for the CCC that the OT, which describes the OC and its operation, is still a valid corpus of writings.

R. Sungenis: I'll grant you that your reasoning COULD be a possible interpretation, but the point is that you don't know it IS the interpretation, at least not well enough to levy the charge of heresy. Heresy does not deal with ambiguities. It sanctions direct and provable statements of error.

Steve: You wrote: "This is verified by the fact that Jerome never uses *foedus* in the NT, but always used *testamentum* in the NT. Jerome further shows us the similarity when he translates Jer 31:31 with *foedus*, but its quote in Hebrews 8:10 with *testamentum*.

Now you've trapped yourself, because you've proven that at least one of the fathers maintained a strict distinction between the two terms.

The CCC has it reversed, then, because they use testamentum (apparently a NT term) for the OT.

R. Sungenis: Trapped myself? I didn't say that Jerome made a distinction between the two words, I said he interchanged them between Jer 31:31 and Hebrews 8:10. The fact that he interchanges them means that he does not see the all-inclusive distinction you are trying to make.

But, as George said, you have to find a convincing argument for why the CCC, after using *Testa mentum*
repeatedly, suddenly (and uniquely) switches to the word
Foedus
when it wants to say that the Foedus "has never been revoked." Why does the CCC not maintain this strict distinction that Jerome maintains?

R. Sungenis: I really don't have to prove anything. George is the one who has to prove something, since he is the one charging the CCC with heresy. The doubt is in my favor, not his, since we don't normally go around saying that Church documents are heretical. And considering that Para 121 can be read in more than one way, George's job is quite difficult, if not impossible.

Steve: And George is correct: the pope first said that the OC was "never revoked by God" on 11/17/80, years before the CCC came out.

What's really interesting is the context in which he himself used this phrase. I could use all of your arguments that you've presented against me to defend the pope's use of this phrase:

"The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the ***Old Covenant***, never revoked by God [cf. Rom. 11:29], and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, ***between the first and the second part of her Bible***."

So I could say, as you are saying about the CCC, "See? The pope is speaking about the 'first

and second part' of the 'Bible.'"

But we both know that won't wash. We both know what he meant by that phrase. And we know what the liberal Cardinals meant when they based their "salvific Old Covenant" teachings on this statement by the pope.

R. Sungenis: Yes, you might be able to say that about the pope, but then again, you might not, since the paragraph is not definitive enough. That is precisely the problem with the pope's comments on these issues. He stops short of heresy on many occassions, but has his cardinals say things in a little more detail that we know is heresy (e.g., Keeler and the RCM document).

In fact, the pope has misquoted Romans 11:29, since St. Paul does not say that the Old Covenant has not been revoked, but only the "gifts and calling of God."

Moreover, if we consider all the times the pope has said in his encyclicals that the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New (and there are about a half dozen places), then we really need more evidence.

Steve: Considering that it was the pope who commissioned and approved the new CCC, I think you have to be consistent. The "context" here is not par. 120-125, the "context" is John Paul II. The "context" is his relations with the Jews.

R. Sungenis: Granted, but charging the CCC with heresy is the issue at stake. I don't make any excuses for John Paul II.

Steve: Either he (and the CCC) meant, literally, that the "Old Covenant has never been revoked," or he (and the CCC) were only talking about the Old Testament writings.

R. Sungenis: Can't do that, Steve, since the CCC is not speaking about Jewish relations, but only about Scripture, as it says very clearly in three paragraphs (121-123). You simply have no

evidence that the CCC is speaking about anything other than Scripture, at least not enough to levy the charge of heresy. John Paul II is another story altogether.

George: None of the cited paragraphs come even close to suggesting that the Old Covenant is over. It says there is now a New Covenant, and that the New Covenant is better than the Old, etc., but it really does not say the Old Covenant is no longer in force. You read that into the text because you know that's what the Church teaches. But it really doesn't say it. One can easily say in the face of these paragraphs that the Newchurch in this Catechism does not teach the Old Covenant is over, and, in fact, seems to be saying otherwise (par. 121).

R. Sungenis: I'll admit it's not the most direct language, but perhaps the author of the Catechism doesn't think it's a contest.

The point remains that Para 121 falls short of the being accused of "heresy" that you were using today. Heresy is a deliberate, calculated and unequivocal statement to circumvent established dogma. Since Para 121 does not elaborate on the meaning of "the OC has not been revoked," except to put it in a context of the OT Scriptures, you have absolutely no basis for your claims.

When you find a statement in the Catechism that says the OC, as a binding legal entity, still operates today as it did in the OT, then you have something. Until then, all you have is an opinion based on wording that is at best ambiguous.

As for Para 762, not only does it say that Israel broke the old covenant and that Christ established a new one in its place, but it cites the very passages in Scripture that we use to teach that the Old Covenant has been revoked, that is, Jeremiah 31:31-34, which would also include the book of Hebrews 8:10 and 10:17-18, and the rest of the context of Hebrews.

This is confirmed by the statement in 1964: "In any case, even though the Old Law prescribed charity, it did not give the Holy Spirit, through through whom God's charity has been poured into our hearts."

Thus it is clear that the Catechism sees no salvific value to the Old Covenant Law, even when it

operated in the OT.

Also, there is Para 580: "In Jesus, the Law no longer appears engraved on tables of stone but upon the heart of the Servant who becomes a covenant to the people...Jesus fulfills the Law to the point of taking upon himself the curse of the Law incurred by those who do not abide by the things written in the book of the law, and do them, for his death took place to redeem them from the transgressions under the first covenant."

Then the Catechism cites Hebrews 9:15, which says: "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."

This is significant, since this passage, and the rest of the book of Hebrews, is clear that the Old Covenant is no longer an active covenant. If it is not active, then it is revoked.

For example, Hebrews 7:18-19 says: For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.

And Hebrews 10:9 says: then He said, "Behold, I have come to do your will." He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

Now, since the Catechism quotes from the book of Hebrews 140 times, do you think if you asked the author of the Catechism whether he, in quoting from Hebrews, intended to circumvent both Hebrews 7:18-19 and 10:9, that he would say "yes, that was my intention, because the Old Covenant has not been revoked, despite what those verses say"?

I don't think so, George. If you want to say Para 121 is ambiguous or lends itself to misinterpretation or is on the surface confusing, I can easily side with you. But when you start using the word "heresy" then you've overstepped your bounds.

George: Robert, I honestly don't think you're making much sense here. Yes, "covenant" and "testament" are interchangeable, but you have to read between the lines here.

R. Sungenis: No, that is precisely what you can't do, George. You keep reading everything "between the lines" and then you charge heresy to the very lines you are reading between, but the reality is that those lines are NOT there.

George: If throughout several paragraphs, only the phrase "Old Testament" is used to refer to the first 46 books of the Bible, and then all of a sudden they use "Old Covenant" to refer to those books, don't you see that it's obvious that here we're NOT talking about the books but the actual Covenant?

R. Sungenis: You don't know that, George, since the paragraphs surrounding the statement don't refer to anything other than the OT Scripture. The Catechism may be referring to something as simple as the fact that the Ten Commandments appear in the Old Covenant, and the Ten Commandments have not been revoked, at least on an ethical level. Since the Catechism (Para 2068) quotes the Council of Trent as saying that the "Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians," then the reference to the Old Covenant in Para 121 has no other referent than what the Catechism has said of Old Covenant laws as being obligatory.

Unless you can find a statement in the Catechism in which "the Old Covenant has not been revoked" refers to something other than what is described above in Para 2068, then you really don't have a case. All you have is a phrase that has been misused by some people, but we are not judging some people, rather, we are determining, as you tested this morning, whether the CATECHISM has committed heresy. You haven't proven that by any stretch of the imagination.

George: ESPECIALLY when considering that JPII himself before the publication of this Catechism said to the Jews that their Covenant had not been revoked.

R. Sungenis: It doesn't matter what John Paul II thinks or says. We are not talking about him. We are talking only about the Catechism and whether it has committed heresy.

George: If the Catechism were an infallible document, then I could understand the dance you're engaging in here, but given that it's a pure Novus Ordo mouthpiece, I don't understand why you're even trying to deny the obvious.

R. Sungenis: There is no "dance," George, and I certainly resent the implication you are making. Your reference to "Novus Ordo mouthpiece" and your attempt to "read between the lines," are simply the extra baggage you bring to a passage that invariably makes you see things in it that are NOT there.

Again, if you want to say that Para 121 is ambiguous or confusing, fine. I have no problem with that. But when you start using the word "heresy" you are definitely out of your range. That is my chief contention with you.

George: Robert, would you then at least say the statement on the Old Covenant having never been revoked is at least proximate to heresy?

R. Sungenis: George, I simply would not use the word "heresy" at all, otherwise you're going to be just as confusing as we claim Para 121 might be. "Proximate to heresy" is a juridical term, and when you get into canonical jurisprudence, then you're required to give substantial evidence for the accusation and conviction. If you can't prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt, you don't have a case. I think I've given you sufficient doubt about how you are interpreting Para 121.You simply don't have enough evidence, at least as far as the Catechism's own witness and the interpretation of its own words.

The Catechism is an official Church document, and thus, to charge it with heresy directly assaults the Church. Ambiguous, yes, in several places (cf., Para 841); heretical, absolutely not.

Now, would I say that Cardinal Keeler is "proximate to heresy" or teaching "heresy" for saying that "the Old Covenant has not been revoked and it is no longer theologically necessary for the Jews to be targeted with conversion to Christiantity"? You bet your sweet life. Would I do the same if John Paul II had said the same (and probably has come very close to doing so)? Certainly. But their opinions are not official Catholic teaching. The Catechism is. That is the

difference.

Alfred: No, even in a legal sense the Old Covenant was never revoked. Revoke means "to annul by recalling or taking back" (Webster's Online) God never annulled or recalled the promises of the Old Covenant. He fullfilled them with the New Covenant. The rules and regulations peculiar to the Old Covenant are no longer binding because their purpose, preparing the way for the New Covenant, has been fullfilled. I seem to remember that the Catechism is quite explicit about this point.

R. Sungenis: No, Alfred, you are confusing the issue. The legal force of the Old Covenant has been totally abrogated, as represented by the Mosaic code. That's what the whole book of Hebrews is about. One covenant replaced another (Hebrew 7:18; 8:13; 10:9, 16-18). Unless you make this distinction, you're going to put everyone back under the law, and condemn us all (Gal 3:10-12; 5:3-4). And that is the same thing the Council of Florence says. END

Alfred: The analogy to the drivers' liscense does not apply. When your driver's liscence is revoked, It is taken away from you. God did not take away the promises of the Old Covenant. He fullfilled them.

R. Sungenis: We're not talking about "promises." We are talking about the whole Mosaic legal system and its condemnation of the sinner (Rom 3:20; 7:6-10; Gal 3:19). THAT is what has been revoked. The "promises" are not part of the Mosaic legal code, since as Gal 3:18 says:

"For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise."

The other important thing to know is that the term "Old Covenant" is associated with the Mosic legal code (2 Cor 3:7, 14) but it is not associated with the "promises."

Those who use the word "Old Covenant" without making the proper distinction between law and promise are confusing the issue, including today's prelates.

There is the Abrahamic covenant and there is the Mosaic covenant, and only the Mosaic covenant is called "the old covenant" (2 Cor 3:7,14; Hebrews 7:18; 8:13; 10:9), and that is the way the Council of Florence used the terms.

The Abrahamic covenant is never called "the Old Covenant," since it is not old, it is still new, and it is now part of the New Covenant (Gal 3:6-9).

Kenneth: If Aquinas is any indicator, Alfred is right on this.

I went to New Advent to see what St. Thomas Aquinas wrote on Hebrews. Aquinas uses the terms "superiority" and "setting aside", but at no point does he indicate that the Old Covenant was revoked. Rather, he emphasizes its weakness and its subsequent fulfillment in the New Covenant.

http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07181a.htm

R. Sungenis: When Thomas uses "setting aside" he means the same as revoked. For example, Hebrews 7:18-19 says: "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness, (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." (NASB). The Greek word behind "setting aside" is athetesis, which is the common word for a disannulment or putting away.

The same is true of Hebrews 10:9: "then He said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will.' He takes away the first in order to establish the second." The verb "takes away" is the Greek anaireoo. This is an even stronger word, since its normal meaning is "to kill" (cf., Mt 2:16; Ac 2:23; 26:10, et al).

When Thomas uses "superiority," he is also following the Scriptural language. Above, Hebrews 7:19 says that the New Covenant is a "better hope."

The same is true in Hebrews 8:6-7: "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second."

Hence, Thomas can say both that the New Covenant was "superior" and that the Old Covenant was "set aside," since both are true.

Kenneth: For what it's worth...it may be theologically convenient to say that the Old Covenant was "revoked" in order to wield it against Kasperites et al., but that simply isn't the case. It's almost as if one is saying that coupons are revoked the moment they are cashed in. It's ludicrous to approach this from a legalistic perspective.

It is much more reasonable to say that the Old Covenant no longer exists by becoming the New Covenant by virtue of Christ's fulfillment of the Old. But can that be construed into "revoked"? I'm not convinced.

R. Sungenis: Scripture never uses such language in regard to the Old Covenant, and I don't know any Church teaching that does either, including Augustine and Aquinas. It says only that the Old Covenant was set aside and the New Covenant took its place. If you want to say that the principles of the Old Covenant are subsumed into the New Covenant, that is perfectly fine.

Alfred: No Robert, a Covenant cuts both ways. It includes the Laws that Man is supposed to follow as well as the promises God gives those who obey his Law. That is why to say a Covenant is revoked is to say that God cancled his promises.

R. Sungenis: You are still confusing the covenants, Alfred. There is the Abrahamic covenant that had promises, and the Mosaic covenant that had Law. That is the whole argument in Galatains 3:16-18, since it opposes the Abrahamic Covenant over against the Mosaic Law that came 430 years later. If you want to say that the Abrahamic covenant was not revoked, I won't have a problem with that. But if you confuse the covenants and don't allow the proper distinctions you're going to cause confusion. Hebrews 7-10 and 2 Cor 3:7-14 is clear that the

Mosaic covenant is the Old Covenant, and it has been annuled.

Alfred: But yes, I agree, the cerimonial laws peculiar to the Old Covenant are not longer in effect.

R. Sungenis: But it's not just the ceremonial laws that were set aside. 2 Cor 3:7-14 says it was the laws written on stone, the Ten Commandments, that were also part of the Old Covenant. Romans 7:7-8 specifically says that the Ninth and Tenth Commandments were the very laws that condemned Paul in sin, from which he needed to be released. Gal 3:10-12 says that if you put yourself under the law of the Old Covenant, they you are required to obey all its provision without fault, otherwise the Law will condemn you.

It is the whole Law, as an active covenant, that is set aside, because as a legal entity the Law's first action was to condemn men in sin. The Catechism says as much (Para 1963, 780, 580). The legal status of the Law had to be removed so that it would not condemn us in sin, but its ethical provisions, that is, the "good and holy" laws is contained, were then transferred to the New Covenant and made even better than they were before.

Arnold: 4) The Pope said:

"The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God [cf. Rom. 11:29], and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and second part of her Bible." (Mainz, Germany, on November 17, 1980)

is more consistent with:

"The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value, for the Old Covenant has never been revoked. "

R. Sungenis: The problem with the Pope's statement, however, is that he is supposed to be quoting Romans 11:29, but Romans 11:29 does not say "the Old Covenant, never revoked by God."

It says, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

I can assure you that the "gifts and the calling of God" are never associated with the Old Covenant, whether in Scripture or in Church teaching. The "gifts and the calling of God" refer to the gospel of salvation, as the rest of Romans 11 makes clear, and that only comes in the New Covenant.

God has never taken away the opportunity to receive salvation for the Jew. He wants them to be saved just like Abraham was saved, but its going to be in the New Covenant not the Old Covenant.

Here are some official statements by popes and councils regarding the Old Covenant Law. Notice how each of them states that it has passed away:

Pius XII: *Mystici Corporis*, 29: "And first of all, by the death of our Redeemer, **the New Testament took the place of the Old Law which had been abolished**
; then the Law of Christ together with its mysteries, enactments, institutions, and sacred rites was ratified for the whole world in the blood of Jesus Christ...
but on the Gibbet of His death Jesus made void the Law with its decrees fastened the handwriting of the Old Testament to the Cross, establishing the New Testament
in His blood shed for the whole human race. "To such an extent, then," says St. Leo the Great, speaking of the Cross of our Lord, "was there effected a transfer from the Law to the Gospel, from the Synagogue to the Church, from the many sacrifices to one Victim, that, as Our Lord expired, that mystical veil which shut off the innermost part of the temple and its sacred secret was rent violently from top to bottom."

30: "**On the Cross then the Old Law died**, soon to be buried and to be a bearer of death, in order to give way to the New Testament of which Christ had chosen the Apostles as qualified ministers"

Council of Trent, ch 1, 793: "but not even the Jews by the very letter of the law of Moses were able to be liberated or to rise therefrom"

Council of Trent, Session 6, ch 2: "that He might both redeem the Jews, who were under the Law"

Council of Trent, Canon 1: "If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done through his own natural powers, or through the teaching of the Law...let him be anathema."

Council of Florence, DS 695: "There are seven sacraments of the new Law: namely, baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and matrimony, which differ a great deal from the sacraments of the Old Law. For those of the Old Law did not effect grace, but only pronounced that it should be given through the passion of Christ; these sacraments of ours contain grace, and confer it upon those who receive them worthily."

Council of Florence, DS 712: "It firmly believes, professes, and teaches that the matter pertaining to the law of the Old Testament, of the Mosiac law, which are divided into ceremonies, sacred rites, sacrifices, and sacraments, because they were established to signify something in the future, although they were suited to the divine worship at that time, after our Lord's coming had been signified by them, ceased, and the sacraments of the New Testament began; and that whoever, even after the passion, placed hope in these matters of the law and submitted himself to them as necessary for salvation, as if faith in Christ could not save without them, sinned mortally."

"All, therefore, who after that time observe circumcision and the Sabbath and the other requirements of the law, it declares alien to the Christian faith and not in the least fit to participate in eternal salvation, unless someday they recover from these errors. Therefore, it commands all who glory in the name of Christian, at whatever time, before or after baptism' to cease entirely from circumcision, since, whether or not one places hope in it, it cannot be observed at all without the loss of eternal salvation."

Pope Benedict XIV, Ex Quo Primum, #59: "However they are not attempting to observe the precepts of the old Law, which as everyone knows have been revoked by the coming of Christ."

Pope Benedict XIV, Ex Quo Primum, #61: "The first consideration is that the ceremonies of the Mosaic law were abrogated by the coming of Christ and they can no longer be observed without sin after the promulgation of the Gospel."

Pius VI, DS 1519-1520 (condemned the following): "Likewise, the doctrine which adds that under the Law man 'became a prevaricator, since he was powerless to observe it, not indeed by the fault of the Law, which was most sacred, but by the guilt of man, who, under the Law, without grace, became more and more a prevaricator'; and it further adds, 'that the Law, if it did not heal the heart of man, brought it about that he would recognize his evil, and, being convinced of his weakness, would desire the grace of a mediator'; in this part it generally intimates that man became a prevaricator through the nonobservance of the Law which he was powerless to observe, as if 'He who is just could command something impossible, or He who is pious would be likely to condemn man for that which he could not avoid' (from St. Caesarius Serm. 73, in append., St. Augustine, Serm. 273, edit. Maurin; from St. August., De nat, et "rat., e. 43; De "rat. et lib. arb., e. 16, Enarr. in psalm. 56, n. I),-- false scandalous, impious, condemned in Baius (see n. 1504).

1520 20. "In that part in which it is to be understood that man, while under the Law and without grace, could conceive a desire for the grace of a Mediator related to the salvation promised through Christ, as if 'grace itself does not effect that He be invoked by us' (from Conc. Araus. II, can. 3 [v.n. 176]),-- the proposition as it stands, deceitful, suspect, favorable to the Semipelagian heresy.

Robert Sungenis, et al
Catholic Apologetics International
April 22, 2003