Forrest, Palm and *National Catholic Register* Teaching Heresy about the

"Chosen People"

By Robert Sungenis

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On the Relationship Between the Jewish People and God

What does Vatican II really say about the Jews and the Covenant?

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by MICHAEL FORREST AND DAVID PALM *10/27/2010* *Comment*

Pope Benedict XVI presents a framed copy of Nostra Aetate to Israeli President Moshe Katsav during their meeting at the Vatican.

Forrest and Palm: As illustrated here , the relationship between the Jewish people and God is one that commonly elicits strong (and divergent) reactions. But what does the Church have to say about this relationship? In particular, are the Jewish people still "chosen," maintaining a special relationship with God? And, if so, does this therefore mean that they are already in a salvific covenant with him such that they have no need of Christ and his Church?

In regard to the first question, perhaps the most significant evidence that the answer is Yes can be found in Section 16 of Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the Church, which says:

Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the people of God in various ways. There is, first, that people to which the covenants and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (Romans 9:4-5): **In view of the divine choice**, they are a people most dear for the sake of the patriarchs, for the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance (Romans 11:28-29).

Here, the Council Fathers explicitly apply the divine choice to the Jewish people as a whole, to "those who have not yet received the Gospel." They cite Romans 11:28-29 as the scriptural authority for this teaching. "Divine choice" is, of course, simply another way of stating that the Jewish people are still "chosen" by God.

R. Sungenis: It seems obvious by this desperate *ipse dixit* juxtaposition of "divine choice" and "Chosen People" that Forrest and Palm deeply desire the Jews to be the "Chosen People" but have no solid evidence to support their claim. Those who depend on these kinds of word games to formulate doctrine are going to get themselves in a lot of trouble.

And what, precisely, do Forrest and Palm mean when they claim the Jews are the Chosen People? Unfortunately, they don't answer that crucial question. They probably sense that the definition is better left ambiguous.

What is behind today's push to have the Jews designated as the "Chosen People" is a political and religious agenda. It creates a platform to reintroduce the Jews as the superior race and implies that they are entitled to certain political, geographic and religious privileges that non-Jews do not and cannot have. All of this comes from a misreading of the Bible, a misreading that is prevalent today in a movement called "Christian Zionism." There is a sizeable portion of that movement among Catholics today, much of it coming from recent Catholic converts who were formally in Christian Zionism movements when they were Protestants and who are now trying to modify Catholic doctrine to fit their Protestant beliefs.

But partiality toward the Jews is expressly forbidden in the New Testament. Almost every book of the New Testament testifies against it. But Forrest and Palm have been on a campaign to dilute and even ignore those teachings, and it is no more evident than in this present article. Teaching that the Jews remain the "Chosen people" after God judged them at the Cross and took away their national and ethnic relationship with Him, is nothing short of heresy, a heresy similar to the 2006 *United States Catholic Catechism for Adult's* heresy on page 131 which says that the "Mosaic covenant is eternally valid for the Jews."

The Catholic Church has never taught such concepts. Both the Tradition and Scripture teach that there is a NEW Chosen People which is composed of any person, Gentile or Jew, who has received salvation in Jesus Christ. This is why St. Peter taught the following when he spoke to the Church at large in 1 Peter 2:9-10:

[9]But you are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises" of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. [10]On ce you were "no people" but now you are God's people; you "had not received mercy" but now you have received mercy. (NAB)

In light of Forrest and Palm's push for the Jews to be the Chosen People, the utter irony of 1 Peter 2:9-10 is that it is speaking mainly of the Gentiles, since when Peter quotes the phrases "no people" and "had not received mercy" he is citing Hosea 1-2, which is the same passage that St. Paul quotes in Romans 9:24-26 when he also speaks of the Gentiles coming into the Church. This also matches what St. Paul says in Galatians 3:6-8, namely, two thousand years prior God gave a promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that he would "justify the Gentiles by faith," and Abraham received that promise when he himself was a Gentile! Jews who convert to Christ are now added to the largely Gentile Church (*cf*. Acts 13:45-48; 15:16-18), whereas in the Old Testament the Gentiles who converted to the Jewish faith were added to the largely Jewish congregation. Accordingly, St. Paul speaks in Romans 9:27 that Jews who accept Jesus Christ and join the Church are the "remnant of Jews" that is saved from Israel, and he never once refers to the Jews of his day as still retaining the title of "the Chosen People."

Hence, if anything, what Forrest, Palm and the *National Catholic Register* should be teaching is, according to 1 Peter 2:9-10, that it is mainly the Christian Gentiles who are the Chosen People and that Jewish converts can join with them, but certainly not teach that unconverted Jews are the Chosen People simply because they are Jews. It is plainly clear in 1 Peter 2:9 that Gentiles and Jews who convert to Christianity are the
new and only
"Chosen People" of God, and as they come into the Church, their race or ethnic origin has absolutely nothing to do with their heavenly or earthly status with God. THAT is the Gospel. Anything else is racism, not to mention a heresy. (See the 1994
Catechism of the Catholic Church
, ¶¶782, 803-804, 1141, 1268).

So we need to ask the penetrating question: why do Forrest and Palm never mention 1 Peter 2:9 when they make their dogmatic conclusions on the meaning and application of the phrase "the Chosen People"? Why do they avoid referring in this article to Christians as "the Chosen People"? If they believe that Christians are the Chosen People, are they then telling us that God has two sets of Chosen People: (a) the Jews simply because they are Jews, and (b) Christian Gentiles and Jews? This is nothing but confusion, and when there is confusion there is error.

Second, “divine choice” is not the same thing as “chosen people.” According to Romans 11:28-29, a divine choice was made to allow the Jews to continue to receive the “gifts and calling” of God even though their national and ethnic blessings and protection from God had been abolished at the Cross. What are the “gifts and calling”? The context specifies that it is the Gospel, and only the Gospel. The very first verses of Romans 11 tell us that, although God He rejected the Jews nationally and ethnically, he did not take away the opportunity for them to be saved spiritually. Paul counts himself as living proof, since he was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin who accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, while he also says that most of the Jews, to this very day, remain in unbelief (Romans 11:1-10). Paul continues the same theme in verses 11-24, saying in verse 14 that he desires to “save some” of the Jews. Then from verses 25 to 31 Paul again speaks about the opportunity of the Jews to become saved by accepting the Gospel. Essentially, the whole chapter is about the Gospel and the necessity of salvation. The big question, as even St. Paul himself indicates in verse 23 when he says “if they [the Jews] do not remain in unbelief, they will be grafted in,” is: will the Jews turn from their unbelief?

The only way a Jew can become a member of the “Chosen People” today is if he accepts Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. A Jew today has no special political or spiritual status simply because he is a Jew. If he is unconverted, he is not of the “Chosen People.” In fact, a Jew, because he denies that Jesus Christ is the divine Savior, is consigned to hell by “divine choice.” Unfortunately, there is a whole crop of “Catholic” apologists today who are saying contrary things to this truth.

Forrest and Palm: This teaching appears even clearer in the original Latin. Similarly, Vatican II’s *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) states in Paragraph 4:

Even so, the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.

A footnote on this passage refers to Romans 11:28-29 and *Lumen Gentium*. Again, the Council Fathers singled out the Jews and directly applied Romans 11:28-29 to them
in the present tense
.

R. Sungenis: Forrest and Palm have an annoying habit of taking general statements from

Church documents and making specific but erroneous doctrines out of them. They are trying to convince us that *Nostra Aetate* "singled out the Jews" and did so in "the present tense," and this position is supposed to equate to their belief that the Jews remain the Chosen People. No it doesn't. Nowhere does any official teaching of the Catholic Church, including *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium*, ever call modern day Jews the "Chosen People…in the present tense." The only time the Catholic Church ever refers to the Jews as the "Chosen People" is in reference to their status with God in the *Old Testament*, not the New Testament. For example, the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to "the Chosen People" twelve times, but in no instance does it apply that phrase to present day Jews who are unconverted (¶¶60, 288, 441, 576, 751, 1081, 1150, 1539, 1611, 1716, 1819, 1963). Additionally, the Church Fathers never called the Jews living in their day "the Chosen People," and neither did any medieval theologians or any of the Church councils or official papal teachings. Forrest and Palm stand alone against the history of the Catholic Church.

In the end, Forrest and Palm are merely reading into Church documents what they want to see, and somehow they have convinced the *National Catholic Register* to sanction their heresy. *Nostra Aetate* merely says that the Jews "remain very dear to God for the sake of the patriarchs." But remaining "very dear to God" and actually being the "Chosen People" are two entirely different things! The former is merely a personal and gratuitous tie; the latter is a legal title with legal obligations that no longer exist today between God and the Jews. On the personal side, long ago God made a promise to Abraham that his future Jewish progeny would be given the same opportunity he had, that is, to become men of faith and accept God, through Jesus Christ, as the Savior (John 8:50-58; Romans 4:1-24). That's all. Nothing more. I think Palm and Forrest are intelligent enough to see the difference but their Zionistic ideology won't let them admit it. Christian Zionism leads them to believe both that the Jews should be deemed the Chosen People and that the nation of Israel should thus receive all kinds of spiritual and political blessings from God. They arrive at these erroneous concepts by reading into Church documents and Pauline scripture passages what they want to see, much like Jewish convert Roy Schoeman does when he claims that the Catholic Church, for "two thousand years," had erroneously interpreted Old Testament prophecies as applying to the Church when, he claims, the Church should have applied them to national Israel (See Schoeman's *Salvation is From the Jews*, Chapters 8-9). It certainly takes a lot of chutzpah to say that two millennia of Church teaching is wrong and that he, a "specially" blesssed Jewish convert who was "visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary" is here to set the record straight. Like Forrest and Palm, Schoeman even cites *Nostra Aetate*

to prove his point yet fails to show even one place where
Nostra Aetate
supports his argument. Unfortunately, over the last 50 years, because of pressure from Zionist Jews and Christian Zionist sympathizers,
Nostra Aetate
has become the proverbial rag doll that is torn apart and emptied of its truth rather than interpreted for what it actually says.

Forrest and Palm: This is echoed also by the citation of the same biblical text in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (839).

R. Sungenis: What is "echoed"? That the Jews are the Chosen People? Hardly. Paragraph 839 of the Catechism never refers to the Jews as the Chosen People. In fact, it goes out of its way not
to do so, since the first sentence says that the title only applies to "the Church" (
i.e
., "When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant…"). It then goes on to say that the "Jewish faith" was "a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant." In other words, Judaism was the proper religion in the Old Testament, not a proper response to God in the New Testament.

Why was it a proper response only in the Old Covenant? The Catechism answers by quoting from Romans 9:4-5, for in the Old Covenant the Jews possessed "the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises…" Immediately following, the Catechism quotes the clause "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" from Romans 11:29, but it makes sure it first quotes "and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ" from Romans 9:5. The reason for this specific progression is simple: the Catechism does not want to confuse the issue by implying that the Jews *still retain* the legal rights to "the sonship, the glory, the covenant, the giving of the law, the worship" but only that Jews, who had such a rich spiritual heritage, should be the most likely ones to receive the "gifts and call" of salvation that he made "irrevocable" for them. Whether the Jews at large will take advantage of their rich spiritual heritage and turn to Christ is a question that St. Paul does not know. All he knows is that, at the end of time, God will have saved all the Gentiles and all the Jews He intends to save, and Paul refers to these as "the fullness of the Gentiles" and "the fullness" of the Jews or "all Israel" in Romans 11:12, 25-26.

Forrest and Palm: This view is supported by another very interesting text, the *Postulatum Pro Hebraeis* that

was presented to and signed by most of the bishops attending the First Vatican Council. Although not officially promulgated and therefore not strictly magisterial, the document nevertheless witnesses to the beliefs of the very bishops who defined the dogma of papal infallibility. On the specific topic before us, their *Postulatum* states, almost 30 years before the First Zionist Congress:

The undersigned Fathers of the Council humbly yet urgently beseechingly pray that the Holy Ecumenical Council of the Vatican deign to come to the aid of the unfortunate nation of Israel with an entirely paternal invitation; that is, that it express the wish that, finally exhausted by a wait no less futile than long, the Israelites hasten to recognize the Messiah, our Savior Jesus Christ, truly promised to Abraham and announced by Moses; *thus completing and crowning, not changing, the Mosaic religion.*

On one hand, the undersigned fathers have the very firm confidence that the holy Council will have compassion on the *Israelites, because they are always very dear to God on account of their fathers* , and because it is from them that the Christ was born according to the flesh.

R. Sungenis: And where does the First Vatican Council call the Jews "the Chosen People"? Answer: nowhere. This is just another attempt by Forrest and Palm to make it appear as if there is some official sanction to designate the Jews as the "Chosen People" when, in fact, Vatican I doesn't even address the issue, much less give any definitive teaching on it. What alarms us even more, however, is Palm and Forrest's italicizing the statement " *thus completing and crowning, not changing, the Mosaic religion.* " Are they implying by this emphasis that somehow the Mosaic covenant remains valid for the Jews, in part or in whole, while at the same time the Jews are supposed to be embracing Jesus Christ? Is that why in other venues Forrest and Palm continue to quote from passages like Romans 9:4-5 and use it to imply that the Jews still retain "the sonship, the glory, the covenant, the giving of the law, the worship"? If so, it wouldn't be the first time that a Zionist Catholic tried to do so. Even some Zionist-based translations make it appear that the New Testament teaches this heresy. They deliberately add of a present tense verb into Romans 9:4 (*viz* ., they add "belongs" in the phrase "to them belongs the sonship…" from the 1952 *Revised Standard Version* – a Protestant translation used by Catholics) when, in fact, the Greek contains no such verb. This is heresy. The Jews no longer have the "sonship, glory, covenants, law, worship" or anything else from the Old Testament. The only thing they have left is a promise – a promise

given to them because of their former spiritual heritage – that Christ will save them if they do not persist in their unbelief.

Forrest and Palm: Here, even the Fathers of the First Vatican Council interpret St. Paul to have been referring to the very same group of people as "enemies" in respect to the Gospel yet "beloved" of God for the sake of the patriarchs of Israel (see Romans 11:28-29).

R. Sungenis: Certainly, but being "beloved" of God is not the same thing as being "the Chosen People" of God. The phrase "Chosen People" is a legal title with legal rights, but "beloved" is a personal and gratuitous relationship – two entirely different things. Unfortunately, most Catholic apologists today don't understand the legal dimensions of these issues, or they deliberately ignore them due to their Zionistic agendas. God still loves the Jews *despite* the fact that they are not the Chosen People any longer, and He does so because He made a promise to Abraham to love the Jews with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:6-29). But unfortunately, most Jews today, as was the case in St. Paul's time, don't want *THAT* kind of love from God. They want a love that makes them the esteemed and revered people of the world; so that they can be the chosen by God above everyone else; the superior race that will receive the lion's share of God's blessing, just because they are Jews. That is spiritual racism of the highest order. Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium have never taught such erroneous concepts, but David Palm and Michael Forrest, sanctioned by the *National Catholic Register*, are now teaching it. Judge for yourself. It's not that difficult.

Forrest and Palm: And although not magisterial, the Holy Father (then-Cardinal Ratzinger) has stated that the Jewish people are still "chosen" by God:

Q: God has not, then, retracted his word that Israel is the Chosen People?
A: No, because he is faithful. (*God and the World*, p. 150).

R. Sungenis: This is very interesting. Forrest and Palm cannot, and have not, cited one official teaching in the whole 2000 years of Catholic history that says the Jews still remain the Chosen People of God, yet they feel not the slightest embarrassment of shining a light on a cardinal who seems to agree in an unofficial, unrehearsed and unedited interview that "Israel is the Chosen People"! I find that very revealing. It means that Forrest and Palm are on a desperate mission to prove their thesis, even if it means pitting a cardinal's offhand opinion against the full weight of

the Catholic magisterium for the last 2000 years.

And when we look closer at the precise question the interviewer asked the cardinal, we begin to wonder whether the interviewer had an agenda and if the cardinal really understood what he was being asked. The question asked of the cardinal was: “God has not, then, retracted his word that Israel is the Chosen People?” rather than “God has not, then, retracted his word that t he Jews
are the Chosen People?” If we really want to be technical, the cardinal never said or agreed that

the Jews
were the Chosen People, since the interviewer referred to “Israel,” not the Jews. “Israel” today is a nation composed of Jews and Gentiles, religious and non-religious. In fact, most Jews in Israel today are quite godless. If the cardinal was being cajoled into saying that modern day Israel is a divinely Chosen nation amongst the nations of the world, he was being led to place himself against Church teaching, since the Catholic Church has never taught such a thing.

So why did the interviewer refer to “Israel” rather than the Jews? I suspect he had a political motivation in mind. He was probably referring to the Zionistic goals of national Israel rather than the salvific possibilities for the Jews at large; and it seems the cardinal wasn’t astute enough at that time to catch the difference. The whole interview is filled with opinions and ambiguities, yet Forrest and Palm latch on to this lone exchange as if it were the definitive proclamation of Church teaching. As it stands, I don’t know of one place in the cardinal’s self-authored and self-edited writings that shows he regards modern day Jews as “the Chosen People,” at least in the legal sense of the term. All his references to the Chosen People refer only to the Jews of the Old Testament. In fact, the cardinal says the same thing about the Jews that I have said in this rebuttal, that is, “they are assured of the faithfulness of God. They are not excluded from salvation…” (*God and the World*, p. 151). The Jews are promised the offer of salvation, and this offer comes to them because God made a promise to Abraham, not because the Jews are and remain “the Chosen People.”

Forrest and Palm: However, in regard to the second question (Does the Church teach that the Jewish people are already in a salvific covenant with God such that they have no need of Christ and his Church?), while the Jewish people have a special relationship with God because of the patriarchs, the Church has also taught that this relationship is not salvific in and of itself. The Church has affirmed that there are not two salvific covenants — one for Jews and one for Gentiles.

All men, Jew and Gentile alike, need Jesus Christ and his Church. In *Lumen Gentium* (1964),

the Church affirmed that God “chose the race of Israel as a people” and “set up a covenant” with them, instructing them and making them holy. However, “all these things … were done by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant” instituted by and ratified in Christ (No. 9). In
Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism
(1985), we read that the “Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer of all.” And in
Dominus Iesus
(2000), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith states, “There is only one salvific economy” (No. 12), and “God willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of
all
humanity. …The certainty of the universal salvific will of God does not diminish, but rather increases the duty and urgency of the proclamation of salvation and of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ” (No. 22).

Thus, while the Church has taught that the Jewish people still maintain an irrevocable and special relationship with God because of their forefathers, it has also taught that this relationship is not salvific in and of itself; it finds its ultimate fulfillment in and through Christ and his Church. The Gospel and the Church are for all men — Jew and Gentile alike.

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R. Sungenis: Well, at least Forrest and Palm are not teaching the more serious heresy that the Jews don’t need Jesus Christ to be saved, as was Cardinal Keeler in the 2002 *Refl ections on Covenant and Missions*
document and the 2006
United States Catholic Catechism for Adults
(at least until they were recently corrected by the US bishops). For that Forrest and Palm are to be commended. But they need to stop muddying the waters with the heresy that the Jews are and remain the “Chosen People” of God. They need to stop twisting Church teachings into spiritual racism. They need to stop teaching that “Jews as Jews” somehow have a special status with God that non-Jews do not have. Nowhere in all of 2000 years of Church teaching have the Jews of the present day ever been officially titled or understood as the “Chosen People.” The only thing Scripture teaches about the uniqueness of the Jews is this: because God made a promise to Abraham to continue to offer the Gospel to the Jews despite their horrendous sins, they are still “beloved” by God. In other words, God has not revoked the opportunity for the Jews to become saved. But they are not the “Chosen People” any longer, for

that was a legal title they once possessed in the Old Covenant but no longer possess in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. The Church, alone, comprises “the Chosen People.” Being a Jew today gives no spiritual, national, ethnic, religious or humanistic privileges or status. Anyone who teaches otherwise today is spreading heresy and racism.

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