

Church-Israel

Talk given by Fr. Peter Hocken in Austin on Fri., March 21

Israel doesn't strike most of us as the heart of our faith. Catholics see this in Israel's inclusion in the section of the Catechism on *Non-Christian Religions* (CCC 839). We don't generally see what Israel has to do with church renewal. But it's clear from the scriptures that Israel is not an addendum. We are faced with the challenge, then, of how to take hold of Israel without "only ever talking about Israel." The "Israel-only" folks miss the bigger picture.

Israel belongs to the structure of God's plan. It is His mystery. It belongs structurally to salvation. Without it, something is incomplete.

This faces us with the question: *Did something go wrong at an early stage in the historical church?* There are no church Fathers to point to in the paragraph on Israel in the Vatican II decree, *Nostra Aetate*. Something *was* lost. But this was not a wholesale loss; key aspects of church and salvation structure were preserved. For example, that the Old and New Testament scriptures *both* are inspired was preserved. This was the Marcion heresy, but the Fathers clearly rejected Marcionism and affirmed the Old Testament. The Old Testament did not become an inferior part of the Canon. This was foundationally preserved. A total loss of the place of Israel would have been to endorse Marcion.

In the Liturgy, we see the fulfillment of promises in the 1st Coming of Jesus and promises yet to be fulfilled in the 2nd. The oldest tradition of the church is better preserved in the Liturgy than in formulated theology, though both are and were linked.

What Belongs to Salvation?

1. **The election of Abraham, & a people, & with it a covenant**, with Moses and David above all. This belongs to the very structure of salvation. This is how God conceived it.
2. **The chosen people are called to be a Priestly people & to bless the Nations**. One is called for the sake of all (and never just for the one).
3. **There is a distinction between Israel & the Nations (*Ethnoi/Goy*), which still remains in the New Testament**. At The Great Commission – *Go and make disciples of all nations* – the 12 had already been sent throughout Israel. Then after the resurrection, they are sent to the Nations.
 - a. Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger of Paris, 1981-2005 (Jewish, for whom Jewishness was essential to his identity, author of *La Promesse/The Promise*, died 2007) wrote of the judgment of Israel in Mt. 19 and the judgment of the Nations in Mt. 25.
 - b. In Rev. 7 we see 1st the 144,000 from the 12 tribes of Israel, and then all the others (*a great multitude no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language*) standing before the throne and the Lamb.
 - c. In the Sermon on the Mount, Mt. 5:13-14: *You are the salt of the earth*. Here "earth" can also mean "land." *You are the light of the world*. Lk. 2:32: *A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and glory to your people Israel*.
4. **The Messianic Promises concerning the people, the land, the King & Jerusalem**.
 - a. There is a 2-stage fulfillment in the 1st and 2nd comings. In the church calendar, Advent is the season that particularly points to the 2nd coming, though many are not aware. In the Catechism, there is a wonderful paragraph about this (CCC 524) though most of us miss it: *When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present the ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming.²⁰⁰ By celebrating the precursor's (John the Baptist) birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: "He must increase but I must decrease."²⁰¹ The idea that all fulfillment happened in the 1st Coming is a distortion. The "fullness" of Jesus in the 1st Coming is *truly full*, but it is a fullness of the 1st stage only.*
 - b. The promises belong to biblical faith. We the Church are looking for fulfillment as much as Israel is. Paul said: *I am in chains for the hope of Israel*. (Acts 28:20). Acts 26:6: *And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers* (NASB).

5. **Jesus is Jewish, from the tribe of Judah & the house of David.** He is both Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the World. Mark Kinzer, a Messianic Jewish scholar, writes that Jesus both *is* and *fulfills* Israel. John the Baptist was sent only to Israel, to prepare the way so that “he” should be revealed to Israel. Jesus takes on the sins of Israel and then of the whole world. Is. 53:8: *For the transgressions of “my” people, he was stricken.* The Gentiles come to salvation through Israel and Israel’s Messiah. Jesus identifies himself totally with his own people.
6. **The Church.**
 - a. The New Covenant of Jeremiah 31 was not a new covenant with a different people, but one that later became opened up to the Nations: *The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people* (Jer: 31:31, 33).
 - b. *He has broken down the middle wall of partition.* There was a separation ordained by God so that Israel could develop as a Holy people, purified from the idolatry rampant in the Nations. This separation was now broken down (Eph. 2:14-15) having abolished in his flesh the *enmity*, but not the *difference*. Division has inherent within it rejection and hostility, but the abolishing of the wall of partition allows the diverse to become one. The distinction is not abolished, but the enmity is.

The foundational reconciliation, then, is between Jew and Gentile. (Ephesians)

Questions:

Vicky: *Who are the Jews? What is the Jewish Church?*

Fr. Peter: Best to speak of the *Church from the Jews* instead of the Jewish Church. The Messianic Jews represent a Jewish expression of the church. But the promises still belong to the Jews who have not yet accepted Messiah (Rom. 11:5 *remnant* idea, also the 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal in Elijah’s day). The distancing of the Church from her Jewish roots could mean that the Jews carry some elements better than the Church, i.e., the hope of the coming of the Messiah. The distancing weakened this hope in the Church.

Vicky: *So are the Jews saved? I know the answer is no, but I can feel there’s something different here.*

Fr. Peter: There is a difference in the Evangelical and Catholic idea of eternal salvation. For the Catholics, people who are sincerely seeking can find Him. There is possibility of salvation for those who haven’t yet come to explicit faith in Jesus. We have to say the situation of the Jews is different, but the dual covenant idea is ludicrous, totally unsupported by scripture. However, German Lutherans and some recent Catholic theologians have espoused this. But there is no statement along this line in the Catechism. Klaus Berger of Germany is very good on this point. One of Fr. Peter’s acquaintances, Menachem Ben Hayim, one of the very 1st believers to make Aliyah to Israel, a non-Charismatic Evangelical, found the idea abhorrent that Jews conscientiously faithful to the Torah could be damned because they hadn’t accepted Yeshua. The Catholic position is that those who are genuinely seeking God & obedient to the light they have received are open to salvation. For the Jews, the idea of *righteousness* is very central, both personal and social. The church is perhaps more focused on *holiness*. In the Jewish tradition, there have always been the righteous outside of Israel—for example, Job—plus, *the righteous among the nations*, i.e., witnessed during the Holocaust.

Amy: In reading the gospels and/or parables with new eyes, revelation comes. ([more here?](#))

Fr. Peter: *(We returned to Amy’s question at the beginning about the Church Fathers, Replacement Theology and something lost in the early church.)* “Something went terribly wrong in the beginning” is better stated *something went a little wrong*. We must attest that God’s faithfulness is *way higher* than what went wrong. It’s not at all a matter of a scale with equal weights of right and wrong in the mix. But the shadow side of Church history is often hidden. Witness the serious sins surrounding the Eucharist. This was awful. Jan Huss, for example. And at one point ... ([I don’t remember the next example](#)). We have to face this, and we haven’t yet done it very well. The history is a mixture of glory and shame from the beginning. The glory outweighs the shame, for sure (they are not on the same level!) but confession of the shame is essential for unity. *One of the greatest points from Israel is God’s faithfulness to her in spite of her terrible track record. This is a huge lesson for us, the Church.

Sandi: *What about Irenaeus, is he a Church Father we should read on this point?*

Fr. Peter: Irenaeus taught the Millennium, and the Church has never rejected it. Pope Victor wanted to reject the Jewish calendar, but Irenaeus objected and Victor changed his mind, though later it was rejected under Constantine (at [Nicaea?](#)) and thereby the diversity was lost.