

Confronting Past Injustice: The Catholic Church and Toward Jerusalem Council II

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I am very happy to accept this invitation to come and share about TJCII (Toward Jerusalem Council II) at this UMJC conference. First, because there were strong UMJC connections in the birth of TJCII. Marty Waldman was president at that time, and one of his first supporters was Dan Juster. But a second reason is my appreciation for the work of Mark Kinzer with which you will be familiar. One reason for this appreciation is my perception that Mark is in a key way the theologian of TJCII – a role so far not yet understood by all involved in the initiative! It is Mark who has articulated most clearly a bipartite ecclesiology, the vision of the Church made up of Jews and non-Jews, retaining their distinctiveness, but made one through the blood of the cross. But this bipartite ecclesiology is in effect the theological foundation of Toward Jerusalem Council II. For the TJCII vision is one of the restoration of this one Church of both Jew and Gentile, with a second Jerusalem council being a coming together in unity of both expressions of the Church in full mutual recognition and rightful honoring. The rightful honoring is a work of restitution. The past injustice of scorn and contempt was the exact opposite of honoring.

Another reason why Mark Kinzer is a key theologian for TJCII is his recognition of the necessary role of the Catholic Church, with his knowledge of the Catholic tradition gained especially during his years working with Steve Clark at Ann Arbor. I was the only Catholic among the original members of the TJCII committee (a second, Johannes Fichtenbauer from Vienna, Austria, was added two years later). I have been aware from the beginning that the involvement of Catholics in this initiative is a stumbling block for many – both Evangelical Christians with no love for Rome and Messianic Jews who are very conscious of the sufferings of the Jewish people at the hands of Catholics and of the Catholic Church. For Messianic Jews, the Jewish memories of Catholic oppression through the centuries are often fortified by Evangelical antipathies to Catholicism. The Messianic opposition to Catholic participation in TJCII has increased again with the recent official Vatican recognition of “the state of Palestine.”

The first reason why it is essential for Catholics to be involved in TJCII is for the full confession before the LORD of the sins of almost 2,000 years against the Jewish people, and particularly against any Jewish expression of faith in Yeshua. Since the Catholic Church bears a major responsibility for this history, the Catholic confession of this sin is essential for full healing, and for restoration to take place. That is why prayer journeys of confession of these sins have played an important part in the story of TJCII. This process began in the first years when the TJCII leadership accompanied by some intercessors prayed in Spain, in Rome, at Nicaea, and in Israel (Yavneh and Jerusalem).

This confession of the Christian sin has concentrated on the replacement teaching and the evil fruits that resulted. As an ordained priest I have often had to lead the way in the Catholic confession of sin. In Nicaea, we confessed three things: 1. The marginalization of the Jewish believers that resulted in their having no representation, no voice, at the Council of Nicaea in the year 325. 2. The decision of Constantine, accepted by the bishops, to impose a Gentile calendar on the whole Church, that prevented Jewish believers from keeping the feasts of Israel within the communion of the Church. This was the beginning of the ban on all Jewish practices by the baptized. 3. The third sin confessed was the excommunication in the year 787 at the Second Council of Nicaea of those Christians who attended synagogue celebrations. Already in Spain, we had confessed the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, for the worst part of the whole history was that of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions. Through the Inquisition, much violence was inflicted upon the Jewish people, leading to forced baptisms and then punishment for practising Judaism in secret. A deeper Catholic humbling took place during two visits to Latin America, where in Argentina (2005) and in Brazil (2013) Johannes Fichtenbauer and I confessed the sins of the Catholic Church against the Jewish people and the conversos or Marranos.

These developments show the essentially spiritual – prophetic character of TJCII. There is a paradox here. TJCII arose in a charismatic way, with a form of vision received by Marty Waldman. Most major decisions of the leadership followed words or pictures from the Lord; for example the initial prayer journeys to Spain, Rome, Nicaea, and Jerusalem, were based on a vision of four

historic gates received by Rick Ridings. The paradox is that TJCII that has had a clearly charismatic character seeks to win over to the One New Man vision church leaders of all kinds and patterns of spirituality. This poses a dilemma: how to present the vision to those not moving in the charismatic realm, while knowing that as a prophetic – charismatic initiative that is unprecedented and totally pioneering TJCII has to be dependent at all points on the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Another important development in TJCII that followed a word from the Lord occurred in 2005 – 06. In 2005, the leadership was preparing a major international conference in Jerusalem for the fall of 2006, to reflect on the first ten years of TJCII and to prepare for the next ten. During our fall meeting in 2005, we received a prophetic word that we had to go to Antioch before we went to Jerusalem. So we changed our plans, moving the spring 2006 meeting from Nairobi to Antioch (present-day Antakya in Turkey). In Antioch, we were some 30 people, with other leaders and intercessors besides the TJCII committee. I was expecting another session of confessing the replacement theology of the Church of the first centuries. But that was not what happened. On the first morning we read aloud all the passages in the New Testament that mention Antioch. The Messianic leaders present then pointed out that three conflicts were connected with Antioch, and all three involved Jewish believers: 1. the disturbance caused when believers from Jerusalem demanded the circumcision of the Gentile converts, the dispute that led to the council of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem described in Acts 15; 2. the dispute between Paul and Peter described in Galatians; 3. the conflict between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark that led to the break-up of their missionary partnership. The Messianic leaders were led to a repentance for divisions and quarrels in the Messianic community and prayer for unity in the movement. There was a sense of the terrible example given to the new Gentile believers.

In Antioch it was made clear to us that the vision for a bilateral ecclesiology came from Antioch, not from Jerusalem. Paul was only able to formulate his teaching on the church in the first half of Ephesians because of his experience in Antioch, where for the first time there was a church of Jew and Gentile together. It was in Antioch that “For a whole year they [Barnabas and Paul] met with the

church, and taught a large company of people” (Acts 11: 26). The restoration for which TJCII prays and works requires the restoration of the right relationship between Antioch and Jerusalem. For TJCII, this experience reinforced our sense that this vision concerns every expression of the Church of the nations, including therefore all the Churches of the East, both Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox. It is an illustration of something that has happened several times in TJCII, how the prophetic prayerful initiative causes something to be opened up which then requires theological analysis and reflection. In Antioch we had present a Greek Catholic sister who had founded a monastery in Syria for the unification of the church of Antioch, and a brother from the Syrian Orthodox Church.¹

The Antioch experience brought TJCII face to face with the ancient churches of the Middle East, several of which are Arabic-speaking and which are deeply entrenched in replacement teaching and largely hostile to Israel. When we left Antioch, one group went eastwards in Turkey to Mardin, an historic center of the Syrian Orthodox Church, and another group went to Egypt where their message was well received at a Coptic Orthodox monastery. It is the Vatican’s concern for the Catholic churches in the Middle East that is a driving element in Vatican diplomacy and has played a role in the recent recognition of a Palestinian “state.”

For Messianic Jews, it is hard to understand how the Catholic Church can teach the unrevoked covenant with Israel in *Nostra Aetate* and the Catholic Catechism and then conclude this agreement with the Palestinians. How is this possible? It is not duplicity. It shows the depth of the penetration of replacement thinking on the whole theology of the Church over so many centuries. Some years ago a Methodist scholar, R. Kendall Soulen, described three forms of replacement theology or as he termed it supersessionism. The first two are fairly obvious. First, *punitive* supersessionism holding that God rejected the Jewish people because of their sin and unbelief, especially for not accepting Jesus. Second, *economic* supersessionism, the view that the covenant with Israel ended when it was fulfilled by and through Jesus. Soulen’s most original and important

¹ Today there are 5 Patriarchs of Antioch, two Orthodox (Greek and Syrian, not in communion with each other) and three Catholic (Maronite, Melkite, and Syrian).

contribution is his third category, that he calls **structural supersessionism**. Structural supersessionism is the form of theology that leaves Israel, its election and history, out of its presentation of Christian faith. Christian theology has been massively affected by structural supersessionism: when its presentation of salvation jumps from Genesis 3 to Matthew 1; when it hardly mentions that Jesus is a Jew, or that the Twelve were Jews; when there is no difference between evangelizing Jews and evangelizing pagans; when Jerusalem is treated just as any other city or as a holy city of the three main monotheistic religions (the latter view characterizes the diplomatic policy of the Vatican). This form of replacement thinking, the absence of Israel and the Jewish people, is harder to combat. It is not obviously anti-Semitic; it is not saying bad things about the Jewish people. It is simply ignoring them. This is the bad fruit of 1,700 or 1,800 years of distancing from one another of the Jewish and Christian traditions, a distancing accompanied by growing ignorance, disrespect, and caricaturing, especially on the Christian side.

Here it is important to mention the Catholic – Messianic Jewish dialogue, in which Mark Kinzer and I have been participants since its beginning in the year 2000. I see the dialogue as totally complementary to TJCII. The two initiatives are both necessary and essential, but they are different and complementary. TJCII is primarily a prophetic initiative, seeking to be led at each stage by the Holy Spirit, whereas the dialogue is fundamentally a theological enterprise. From one angle, TJCII is the more important. Following the centuries of separation, the work of reconnection, of new encounter, requires both the prophetic – spiritual and the theological. The prophetic – spiritual helps to clear the polluted air, it provides an inspiring vision capable of producing passionate commitment among the ordinary people. But without the scholarly work of exegetes, theologians, and historians, there is nothing to replace the distorted teaching of the past, nothing that will lead to changes in church teaching and policy. This rethinking of the teaching of the Church, this purification of the understanding of the Church, is a theological task, for which TJCII is not equipped.

From this angle of changing church thinking, the dialogue is more important. An important element in the dialogue is its quasi-official character: being started by

the theologian to the papal household, Fr Georges (later Cardinal) Cottier, op, virtually certainly with the approval or at the suggestion of Pope John Paul II. For this reason it has always had a bishop participant and since 2003, a Cardinal participant (currently Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, op, archbishop of Vienna, Austria). So far, the dialogue has had minimum effect on Catholic theology. One reason has been the confidentiality we were asked to observe at the beginning – because of the Catholic concern that the dialogue with the mainline Jewish community would be endangered if the existence of this dialogue were revealed. In 2006, this secrecy was lifted, but with discretion strongly recommended. Today there is a freedom to make known its existence and its discussions. Mark's new book *Searching Its Own Mystery*, is in fact the publication with some modifications and additions of the papers he had prepared for the dialogue.

In my view it was providential that TJCII began first, as the ground has to be cleared and prepared by spiritual means, by prayer and repentance, constant features in TJCII. From its nature, TJCII has to be open to all Christians and all Christian churches. The dialogue is only between Messianic Jews and Catholics, though in the last three years the Catholic team now has two Jewish Catholic members, both of them involved with Mark in the Helsinki Consultations. TJCII has been helping here to sow the seed for other theological encounters, for example a possible Messianic Jewish – Anglican dialogue.

The serious interaction between Messianic Jews and Catholics embodied in the dialogue is important because of the preponderant role played by the Catholic tradition in the formulation of Christian theology through the ages. This task can only be fulfilled by those for whom their continuous tradition is foundational. In fact, it is due to the Catholics and an Anglican in TJCII that Marty Waldman's original vision changed from being a Jerusalem Council made up of Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Messianic Jews to be held at Pentecost 1997 to becoming a long-term initiative Toward Jerusalem Council Two working for a gathering of the leaders of all Jewish believers in Yeshua and of all Christian confessions, that can be possible only after much work by the Holy Spirit on all sides.

This necessary interaction of the whole Jewish heritage with the whole Christian heritage cannot take place simply between Messianic Jews and Evangelical

Christians. It has to be a healing of the wounds resulting from eighteen hundred years of hostility. The Jewish and the Christian traditions became separate and in conflict with each other in the early Christian centuries, and decisively from the fourth century. The rejection of the Jewish believers from what became the Church of the Gentiles was perhaps foreseen by Paul when he warned against the arrogance of the Gentile believers toward their Jewish brothers: “If you do boast, remember that it is not you that supports the root, but the root that supports you.” (Rom. 11: 18). The result of this separation of the Church from its roots in Israel has been: on the Jewish side, a Jewish tradition distorted by the rejection of Yeshua; and on the Christian side, a Christian heritage distorted by the exclusion of Israel. The correction of these distortions is needed for the coming of Messiah Jesus in glory. It is only as this serious encounter takes place that the structural supersessionism can be removed that blinds the Church from even considering the lasting promises concerning the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem.

Both TJCII and the Catholic – Messianic dialogue are addressing the consequences of this history. TJCII addresses the issues most fully by insisting that every Christian tradition has a role to play, including the Catholic and the Orthodox. A statement in the year 2000 from the Gentile members of the TJCII committee stated: “We recognize that for such a Council to take place, all the Gentile Churches and traditions must be led by the Holy Spirit into a process of prayer and purification.” I should mention that early on in TJCII we realized that a presence was needed from the Orthodox Church. So we reserved a place on the leadership team for an Orthodox when we found the right person. Fr Vasile Mihoc of the Romanian Orthodox Church joined the committee in 2005.

I want to move now to what I think is the deepest reason why the participation of the Catholic Church (and of the Orthodox Churches) in TJCII is absolutely necessary. The ancient Churches require the deepest work of purification, and at the same time are bearers of the deepest treasures in Christ. The ancient Churches need the deepest purification, because in them the replacement or supersessionist virus has been at work the longest, and became “quasi-canonical” in the writings of the Church fathers. This tradition is an even bigger obstacle for the Orthodox Churches than it is for the Catholics with the great

Orthodox reverence for the Church fathers and for whom there is not as yet any equivalent to Vatican Two. At the same time, the ancient Churches in their origins received their faith from the Jewish root, which is the source of their hidden riches. These riches are to be found above all in the liturgies of the ancient churches, whose roots are older than the supersessionist virus. For the early Christian church was a worshipping community long before it began to formulate creeds. So the eschatological orientation of the first Church is preserved more strongly in the liturgies than in the theology. So a key area for study is the process of transition in worship from the all-Jewish community of the first generation to the virtually all-Gentile church of the fourth century.

This encounter of the Jewish and the Christian heritages is a massive task, much greater than we usually assume at the outset. The Jewish participants have to scrutinize the Jewish history and heritage to sift out what results from the Jewish rejection of Yeshua. The Christians have to sift every aspect of their specific traditions to sift out whatever comes from a replacement-supersessionist hermeneutic. We then have to be fully open to the Holy Spirit's cleansing work on both sides. In fact, receiving the challenges posed by the other are a key element in the purification.

My impression is that many people committed to the mutual belonging of Jew and Gentile in Messiah have not yet understood the depth of this challenge to both sides. The Catholic presence is a constant reminder. Human beings, even believers in Jesus Christ, often do not like big challenges. So there is constantly the temptation of the short-cut, that may seem to promise big things, but in fact achieves very little. Permit me to indicate some of the short-cuts that can be very tempting at the popular level:

First, that the Gentile believers simply need to abandon their Gentile ways, abandon the special honoring of Sunday, abandon the Christian feasts, and simply keep the feasts of Israel. This is in effect another variation on the position of the Jewish visitors from Jerusalem to Antioch, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (Acts 15: 1). It fails to see that there is something of God in the historical Christian pattern, in particular that Sunday is privileged because it is the day of the resurrection of

Yeshua. It is hardly compatible with the decision of the first Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

Second, the argument of some Messianic Jews who want nothing to do with historic Judaism arguing that theirs is a biblical Judaism so they do not need to pay any attention to rabbinic Judaism or to Jewish history. This can often be accompanied by a mentality that assumes Hebrew good, Greek bad. Both these positions are naïve!

Third, the position of those Gentile Christians who want to have the Messianic Jews accepted as part of the body of Christ, and affirm their right to existence, but don't want any of their own beliefs and practices to be challenged. It is vision for acceptance of an unreconciled diversity.

Fourth, the argument of some Hebrew Catholics that all that is needed is for the Catholic Church to provide a Jewish option within the communion of the Catholic Church, i.e. a Hebrew liturgy for Jewish Catholics. This option ignores the first place of the Jew. It is in fact a form of assimilation, friendly and not coercive, but nonetheless presented within an overall church framework shaped by the Gentile world.

The vision of TJCII when fully understood rejects these short cuts. For the vision includes at its heart a restitution – of the proper place of the Jewish *ekklesia* as the elder brother. I want to move toward a conclusion by highlighting what I see as the major areas for this Jewish – Christian interaction.

First, the Jewish avoidance of dogmatic definition, being at ease with contradictions, contrasts strongly with the Christian love of definition, harmonization, and systematization. The Jewish tradition instinctively leaves open, where Christians seek closure. This is most obvious in the huge difference between rabbinic discourse and Christian theological methods. Walter Brueggemann sees in the Christian theological reading of the Old Testament a deep manifestation of supersessionism. “It is not only a pre-emption of the *substantive* claims of the text, but also a pre-emption of the style and mode of

the text that invite a distorted reading.’² This point is closely related to the relationship between the Hebrew and the Greek.

Second, eschatology. There is a strong contrast between the Jewish messianic hope oriented to a fulfilment within this creation as a climax of history and the Christian placing of final fulfilment outside and over history in heaven. When I encountered Messianic Jews, I saw immediately how the hope for the Messiah’s return to take up his throne in Jerusalem is central to their identity. This awareness showed me how small a place eschatology plays in Catholic identity, even though we profess in the Nicene Creed that He will come again to judge the living and the dead. So I attempted to raise this issue in the dialogue through presenting a paper on a Jewish Catholic of the 18th century, who sought to bring together the Jewish eschatological hope with traditional Christian faith. But the initial attempts to raise this issue in the dialogue were a failure, as the senior Catholics on the team dismissed this pioneer as a marginal figure with bizarre ideas. But at a TJCII consultation hosted by the Messianic congregation in Kiev, Ukraine, in May 2014, I gave a teaching on this theme arguing that at present it is impossible to come up with a fully satisfactory eschatology because the Jewish and the Christian traditions each carry something essential that has to be discerned through study and the Holy Spirit and then integrated, also through the Holy Spirit.³ When I read Mark’s new book, I saw I had been operating according to his recommended hermeneutic.

Third, the anchoredness of the Jewish heritage in the physically embodied, which contrasts with the strong Christian tendency to over-spiritualize, which was necessitated by the impossibility of understanding the fulfilment of the Messianic promises within a replacement framework. This issue shows up in the difficulty many Christians have in receiving the promise of the land as having any validity after the first coming of the Messiah. In principle, this issue of the physical and the spiritual should be easier for Catholics and Messianic Jews to discuss, because of the Catholic understanding of the sacramental, in which the physical is the vehicle of the spiritual.

² Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 111.

³ This Kiev talk will appear in an expanded form in a new book *Azusa Rome Zion* to appear early in 2016.

Restitution for the Past Injustices

I conclude by asking the question that Messianic Jews sometimes put to me: when is the Catholic Church going to make restitution for this history of injustice? One person who has put this challenge very forcefully is Joseph Shulam, who has his eye on a big Catholic property in Jerusalem that was built by Hebrew Catholics and today is under-used and not being used for its original purpose. His vision is for this building to become a retirement home for Messianic believers.

The idea of the Catholic Church making restitution for past wrongs is not unthinkable for Catholics. The Catholic Church has already made some acts of restitution in regard to the Orthodox Churches. At present some form of restitution to the Jewish community in general is more likely than a restitution to Messianic Jews. First, there has to be a Catholic recognition of some kind of the Messianic movement. This is one question – recognition – on which the dialogue has focused. Then there needs to be a grasp at the level of Pope and bishops of the evil effects of replacement teaching, and particularly of structural supersessionism that just took Israel out of the story after the cross and the resurrection of Yeshua. The Catholic authorities will only act differently towards the Jewish people as the Israel-honoring and Israel-affirming teaching of *Nostra Aetate* from Vatican Two and the Catechism takes root and becomes instinctive thinking throughout the Catholic world. There has to be a deeper reception and integration into regular Catholic teaching of what amazingly found its way into para. 674 of the Catholic Catechism: “The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by ‘all Israel’...”⁴

It is for these reasons that Mark Kinzer’s contribution to the dialogue, and his new book are so important. May the book be translated into many languages. English-language books are not enough to shift Catholic thinking, as it is not the dominant language in the Catholic world. But in Italian, German, French, and Spanish, ... *eppure si mouve!*

⁴ “The ‘full inclusion’ of the Jews in the Messiah’s salvation, in the wake of ‘the full number of the Gentiles,’ will enable the People of God to achieve ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,’ in which ‘God may be all in all.’” (CCC, 674).