

ICPE, Allerheiligen, Germany: Thursday November 22, 2007

Talk 1: The Teaching of the Magisterium

I will approach the issue of Israel and the Jewish people by looking first at the developing teaching of the Magisterium. In effect, this begins with Vatican Two, which in this area represented a real revolution. (This is why the teaching on the Jews, like that on ecumenism and on religious liberty, was rejected by the most rigid conservatives like Archbishop Lefebvre and his followers.)

Vatican Two represented **the first time in Catholic history** that the Church officially addressed the relationship between the Church and Israel. It was just assumed – and frequently preached – that God had rejected the Jewish people when they rejected Jesus as Messiah and Lord. But before *Nostra Aetate* (1965) there was no authoritative teaching on this subject. Why did this come up for the first time at Vatican Two? First, because the **horror of the Holocaust** with the cold-blooded and calculated murder of six million European Jews, had begun to impact the Christian consciousness, and to raise the unavoidable question: to what extent had negative Christian attitudes towards the Jews made such a horror possible? Secondly, because the **renewal of biblical studies** in the Catholic Church – especially since Pius XII’s encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) – was making some scholars more aware of the Jewish character of the New Testament as well as the Old. Thirdly, because of **Pope John XXIII**. He was the Pope who called the Council, and he was the Pope who heard the cry of the Jewish people. During the Second World War, he had been Apostolic Delegate in Bulgaria, where he had issued vast numbers of documents to assist Jews escape arrest and deportation. When a French Jewish historian, Jules Isaac, had an audience with Pope John, and asked that the Council address the problem of the history of Catholic contempt for the Jews, the Pope decided that the Council must address this topic.

It may be most helpful to unpack the different elements in the teaching of the Council and of the Popes by going through different themes in turn. In this, I will follow what the Council said by later teaching, especially from John Paul II and from the Catechism.

1. The covenant with Israel not revoked.

“There is, first, that people to which the covenants and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9: 4 – 5): in view of the divine choice, they are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance (cf. Rom. 11: 28 – 29).” (*Lumen Gentium*, para. 16). “As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognise the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews, in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading. Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle.” (*Nostra Aetate*, para. 4). Here there is a footnote reference to Romans 11: 29. See also the Catechism, paras. 219 – 220.

In Mainz, speaking to the Jewish community of West Germany in November 1980, John Paul II rounded out what *Nostra Aetate* had taught in referring to Romans 11: 29, speaking of the “Old Covenant” as “never revoked by God”.

The Vatican document “Notes on the Correct Way to present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church”, of 1985 states: “The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design. We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people punished, preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic. It remains a chosen people, ‘the pure olive on which were grafted the branches of the wild olive which are the gentiles’ (John Paul II, 6 March 1982, alluding to Rom 11: 17-24).”¹

2. The rootedness of the Church in Israel.

“As this Sacred Synod searches into the mystery of the Church it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock. Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the Prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ – Abraham’s sons according to faith – are included in the same Patriarch’s call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people’s exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His Inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ Our Peace reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.” (*Nostra Aetate*, para. 4).

In 1979, John Paul II, commenting to representatives of Jewish organizations on the first section of *Nostra Aetate*, para. 4, said: “Thus it understood that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities.” This point was further developed in Rome in 1986 during the first-ever visit of a Pope to a synagogue: “The Jewish religion is not “extrinsic” to us, but in a certain way is “intrinsic” to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.” “This people perseveres in spite of everything because they are the people of the Covenant, and despite human infidelities, the Lord is faithful to his Covenant.”²

3. The repudiation of charges of deicide, of being accursed, of the teaching of contempt.

“True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without

¹ *Catholic Jewish Relations*, p. 47, para. 25. “This people perseveres in spite of everything because they are the people of the Covenant, and despite human infidelities, the Lord is faithful to his Covenant.” (Address of John Paul II to Symposium on “The Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu”, 31 October 1997 in *Information Service – P.C.P.C.U.- Vatican City 1997/IV*, p. 142).

² Address of John Paul II to Symposium on “The Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu”, 31 October 1997 in *Information Service – P.C.P.C.U.- Vatican City 1997/IV*, p. 142.

distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. ...” (*Nostra Aetate*, para. 4).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism incorporates the teaching of Vatican II, but on some points goes further. The following paras relate to the Jewish people:

218 – 220: God’s love for Israel. “Through Jeremiah, God declares to his people, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.’” (CCC, 220 citing Jer. 31: 3).

528 on the Epiphany: “The magi’s coming to Jerusalem in order to pay homage to the king of the Jews shows that they seek in Israel, in the messianic light of the star of David, the one who will be king of the nations. Their coming means that pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as Son of God and Saviour of the world only by turning towards the Jews and receiving from them the messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament. The Epiphany shows that ‘the full number of the nations’ now takes its ‘place in the family of the patriarchs,’ and acquires *Israelitica dignitas*”. Schönborn on present tense.

597 – 98: Jews not collectively responsible for Christ’s death: all sinners the authors of Christ’s Passion.

674: NEW: note heading over 673: “**The glorious advent of Christ, the hope of Israel.**” “The glorious Messiah’s coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by ‘all Israel’”.

781:

839 – 40: Irrevocable calling, citing Rom. 9: 4 – 5 and 11: 29.

1096: Jewish liturgy and Christian liturgy.

1340: re-Passover. “the Eucharist, which fulfils the Jewish passover”.

JP 2 in 2003: “**there is need for acknowledgment of the common roots linking Christianity and the Jewish people, who are called by God to a covenant which remains irrevocable** (cf. *Rom* 11:29) and has attained definitive fullness in Christ. Consequently it is necessary to encourage dialogue with Judaism, knowing **that it is fundamentally important for the self-knowledge of Christians** and for the transcending of divisions between the Churches, and to work for the flowering of a **new springtime in mutual relations**. This demands that each ecclesial community engage, to the extent that circumstances permit, in **dialogue and cooperation with believers of the Jewish religion**. This engagement also implies that “**acknowledgment** be given to any part which the children of the Church have

had in the growth and **spread of antisemitism** in history; **forgiveness must be sought for this from God**, and every effort must be made to favour **encounters of reconciliation and of friendship with the sons of Israel**". (*Ecclesia in Europa*, para. 56).