

ICPE, Allerheiligen, Germany: Thursday November 22, 2007

Talk 2: The Huge Implications of this Teaching

Now I want to move to a subject of huge importance for the Renewal of the Church. I do not think it was a coincidence that the new teaching on the Jewish people formed part of a Council called for the renewal of the Church. This teaching on the Jews cannot be treated as other agenda not related to Church renewal, and it cannot be rightly understood as a marginal issue in Catholic doctrine. OK, the Council said something about the Jews, but let's focus on the central issues like Jesus Christ, salvation, the Church, missiology; we cannot say this because the teaching on the Jews has direct implications for all these key topics. So that is what I want to address in this second talk. In this talk, I will sometimes speak about Israel: I use this term theologically to refer to the whole reality of the chosen people.

In the post-Vatican Two teaching, the Jews are still the people of the covenant. This was expressed in the prayer of John Paul II at the Western Wall in March 2000. Here is a first point of challenge to our received ideas! When we thought God had rejected the Jews, the relationship between the two covenants was clear: the New has replaced the Old. But now that we recognize that the Jews are still the people of the covenant, we have a new theological question: what is the relationship between the Old and the New? One theological position being pushed by some theologians, often those involved in the dialogue with the rabbis, is that there are now two separate covenants: the Mosaic through which the Jews come to salvation; and the New Covenant, through which the Gentiles come to salvation. Obviously in this view, there is no place for evangelisation of the Jews. This position is not supported by Benedict XVI, and is clearly in opposition to many key texts in the New Testament: e.g. Rom. 1: 16; 1 Tim. 2: 6. The Pope has not commented on this question yet as Pope, but as Cardinal he wrote a book in which he presented the New Covenant as a renewal of the one covenant. We should note here that in the famous prophecy in Jeremiah 31 about the new covenant, the Lord promises that He will make a new covenant "with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (vv. 31, 33).

In fact, the first talk already touched on the implication of this teaching for our understanding of the Church. "The Jewish religion is not "extrinsic" to us, but in a certain way is "intrinsic" to our own religion." (John Paul II). In other words, you cannot understand Christianity rightly apart from the Jewish people and their faith. The Church is inherently connected to Israel. This is graphically presented by Paul in the image of the olive branches in Romans 11, that John Paul II referred to in 1982, when he spoke of Israel as "the pure olive on which were grafted the branches of the wild olive which are the gentiles". As *Nostra Aetate* recognized, the first generation Church was totally Jewish: Jesus, Mary, the Twelve, Paul, Stephen, Barnabas, etc. In Romans 11, Paul sees the Jews who did not believe in Jesus as branches cut off from the natural olive tree. The Gentile believers are like branches of a wild olive tree that are grafted on to the natural olive tree, which is believing Israel, centred on Jesus. This is the vision of the Church presented in Ephesians 2 and 3.

Here we have a vision of the Church as essentially composed of Jews and Gentiles, reconciled through the blood of the cross. In fact, it presents the opposite view to what we have often thought, namely that the Jews had to be brought into the Church. The teaching of Ephesians

is that the Gentiles are brought into the household of Israel. “The salvation he brings through his paschal mystery is offered first to the Israelites. As foreseen by the Old Testament, this salvation has universal repercussions as well. It is also offered to the Gentiles. Moreover, it is accepted by many of them, to the extent that they have become the great majority of Christ’s disciples. But Christians from the nations profit from salvation only by being introduced, by their faith in Israel’s Messiah, into the posterity of Abraham (Gal. 3: 7, 29). Many Christians from the ‘nations’ are not aware that they are by nature ‘wild olives’ and that their faith in Christ has grafted them onto the olive tree chosen by God (Rom. 11: 17 – 18).”<sup>1</sup>

### Our Understanding of God

Replacement teaching has been very dangerous for our understanding of God. For it means that God made many promises to Israel, and then changed his mind. RT thus has the tendency to undermine our trust in the total fidelity of God, and our reliance on his promises. Is. 41: 8 – 11. “I said: You are my servant; I have chosen you, and have not rejected you.” (41: 9b). Post-exile. God’s enormous love for Israel, and his patience with Israel despite constant rebellion and sin. Hosea 11: 8 – 9. The great promises of the Messiah and the coming Messianic age, that we will hear in Advent, were mostly given at the time of catastrophe and suffering following sin.

I think this shows up in our often weak awareness of God the Father. Tom Smal: *The Forgotten Father*. Easy for widespread ideas of a vengeful God, of a distant God – not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It makes it hard for us to understand the relationship of Jesus to the Father (see also below).

### Our Understanding of Jesus

Of course, one of the deepest challenges is to our understanding of Jesus. Most of our presentations of Christian faith, also in our evangelization, present Jesus as a kind of generic man. God created man; man sinned; so God needed to send a Redeemer, so He sends His Son, Jesus, who becomes “man”. In this view, all that matters is that the Son of God took on human nature. In this view too, the story from Genesis 4 to Malachi has no essential connection with the plan of salvation.

But in fact, “man” in general is an abstraction. There is no such thing as a generic man. Every human person belongs to a people, has parents and relatives, belongs to a culture and speaks a particular language or languages. So it is highly significant that the New Testament begins with this description of Jesus: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1: 1). As John Paul II said to the Jewish community in Mainz in November 1980: “In der „Erklärung über das Verhältnis der Kirche zum Judentum“ vom April dieses Jahres haben die Bischöfe der Bundesrepublik Deutschland den Satz an den Anfang gestellt: ”Wer Jesus Christus begegnet, begegnet dem Judentum“. Dieses Wort möchte auch ich mir zu eigen machen. Der Glaube der Kirche an Jesus Christus, den Sohn Davids und den Sohn Abrahams, enthält in der Tat, was die Bischöfe in jener Erklärung ”das

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<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002), para. 85, p. 194.

geistliche Erbe Israels für die Kirche“ nennen, ein lebendiges Erbe, das von uns katholischen Christen in seiner Tiefe und seinem Reichtum verstanden und bewahrt werden will.” (para. 1).

Once we start from the fact that the Son of God became a Jew, then we have a new theological question: **is there a difference between Jesus’ relationship to Israel, his own people, and his relationship to the people of the nations?** We may want to protest loudly that there is no difference. He loves us all equally. He died for us all. Yes, but these points do not fully answer this question. Here again we need to look carefully at the data of the New Testament.

1. **The mission of Jesus from the Father.** “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matt. 15: 24). This saying of Jesus fits with his instructions to the Twelve: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matt. 10: 5 – 6). In other words, Jesus is only sending the Twelve where He has been sent.
2. **The baptism of Jesus.** Jesus, who is without sin, accepts the baptism of repentance from John the Baptist. But John’s baptism is only for the people of Israel. “the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel” (John 1: 31). In his baptism, Jesus is identifying himself totally with his own people (a key theological point), including their sinfulness.<sup>2</sup> See also Isaiah 53: 8; John 11: 50 – 51 and Gal. 4: 4 – 5. “C’est à ce rite que Jésus s’est soumis pour être l’Israël obéissant à Dieu.”<sup>3</sup>
3. **Israel as Priestly People.** We have to understand the total identification of Jesus with his own people in the context of important Old Testament principles: (a) the leader who embodies the whole people (as father, as king); and (b) the calling of Israel to be a priestly people through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed (see the promises to Abraham: Gen. 12: 3b; 22: 18). See also Exodus 19: 6 “Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”. As priestly nation, Israel is called to serve the “nations”, not themselves.

That is to say, Jesus is called first to be the Messiah of Israel. Through his obedience as Messiah of Israel, he fulfils Israel’s calling as a priestly people, and so becomes the Saviour of the world. In other words, we as Gentiles are saved not by Jesus bypassing Israel or ignoring the chosenness of his own people, but precisely through his total obedience to his particular call. God always arrives at the **universal** through the **particular**. Jesus embodies in his person Israel, the first-born son of God (Ex. 4: 22), becoming the only-begotten Son of the Father. In the election of Jesus, the election of Israel is fully expressed and realized. “Ne pas reconnaître son Élection, c’est ne pas reconnaître l’Élection du Christ.”<sup>4</sup> It is wrong to think

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<sup>2</sup> “Dans ce conflit, la figure qui nous est donnée du Fils et du Messie résume la totalité d’Israël. ... La figure du Messie est en même temps la figure d’Israël; la figure de Jésus est en même temps celle des siens, de son Eglise et celle d’Israël. ... Bien des choses ne sont compréhensibles que par cette solidarité de Jésus, du Messie avec son peuple.” Jean-Marie Lustiger, *La Promesse* (Paris: Editions Parole et Silence, 2002), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Lustiger, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> Lustiger, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

that God demoted Israel as first-born son in favour of Jesus: rather Jesus enters into his unique calling precisely through the unique calling of his own people.

When does this opening up from the particularity of Israel to the universality of all peoples take place in the ministry of Jesus? It happens with his death and resurrection. It is only after the resurrection that Jesus says to the apostles: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28: 19). It is perhaps significant that in Acts 4: 27, the prayer of the Church in Jerusalem brings together the Gentiles and the Jews as conspiring against Jesus: “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.”

### Our Understanding of Mary

Similarly, we need to understand Mary in her totally Jewish context. The replacement teaching had the effect of separating Mary from her own people. The Holy Father wrote an excellent small book on Mary when he was Cardinal with the title *Tochter Zion* [Daughter Zion]. While *Lumen Gentium* sought to prepare a biblically-based ecclesiology, and its chapter on Mary is much more biblical than pre-conciliar teaching, it really does not root Mary in the history of her people. It uses the Old Testament to present Mary as the “new Eve”, the mother of all the living in Christ. Cardinal Ratzinger’s book goes much further than this.

David Rudolph: Messianic Jews love to teach on the great women of the Old Testament, such as Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. But he said, we never speak about the greatest Jewish woman believer of all time, Myriam. Various elements in a biblical presentation of Mary in the context of Israel:

- she is the mother of faith, as Abraham is the father of faith.
- Mary is someone who represents the whole people of Israel, as did Abraham, Moses, David and the suffering servant. She represents them in their calling to bring the Messiah into the world.
- Notice the Messianic character of the angel’s message to Mary: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1: 32 – 33).
- Notice how Simeon’s prophetic song, the *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2: 29 – 32), sung each day in Night Prayer, echoes Is. 42: 6 and 49: 6.
- Notice how the prophecy of Simeon about her son given to Mary (alone) relates to Israel: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against.” (Luke 2: 34). His final words, “And a sword will pierce your own soul too.” (Luke 2: 35) must be connected with the prophecy about her son. Mary’s suffering is connected with the division in Israel provoked by her son.
- Revelation 12 moves from the woman “clothed with the sun” (v. 1), who gives birth to the “male child, who will rule all the nations” (v. 5), to the woman who is given refuge in the desert (v. 14), whose offspring are “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (v. 17). This woman is Israel that becomes Church in Mary.

## Our Understanding of the Apostles

Because we had forgotten the Jewish origins, we have just assumed that Jesus chose the Twelve, without any special reference to their being Jews, and then sent the Twelve out into the whole world. This overlooks the significance throughout the Bible of the distinction and relationship between Israel and the nations. It is in line with this that in the New Testament Paul is called to be the “apostle to the nations”. The rediscovered awareness of the Jewish roots means that we discover again the significance of the Twelve being Jewish. What does this involve?

- It is evident that Jesus chose twelve apostles because there were twelve tribes of Israel. They are only sent out during Jesus’ earthly ministry to the Jews (see Matt. 10: 5- 6). In John’s vision of the heavenly Jerusalem in the book of Revelation, the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the twelve gates, and the names of the “twelve apostles of the Lamb” were written on the foundations of the walls.
- The Twelve have a special relationship to Israel that will continue even in the final judgment. “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt. 19: 28). In his book *La Promesse*, Cardinal Lustiger notes the difference between the judgment of Israel and the Church on the one hand, and the nations on the other. The former is addressed in the parable of the talents (Matt. 25: 14 – 30) , and the latter in the imagery of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25: 31 – 46).
- In Galatians, Peter is described as “an apostle to the Jews” and Paul as “an apostle to the Gentiles” (Gal. 2: 8). There are signs in 1 Peter of Peter’s focus on the Jewish believers in Jesus: (1) “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to the chosen exiles of the diaspora [eklektois parepidemois diasporas Pontou, Galatias, Kappadokias, Asias kai Bithunias]” (1 Pet. 1: 1). (2) “She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings” (1 Pet. 5: 13). Babylon as centre of persecuting Empire, and place of exile for the Jews.
- New light on the significance of Church of Rome being founded on the witness of the two apostles, Peter and Paul. One feast (June 29), both mentioned in formulae of blessing, of indulgences, etc.

## Our Understanding of the Eucharist

Link with Passover. Covenant sacrifice.

Jewish understanding of memory: “Do this in memory of me.”

Messianic promise and expectation. “I will not eat it again with you until ...”

Relationship to the coming Kingdom.