

1996

The Catholic Catechism on Jews and Judaism

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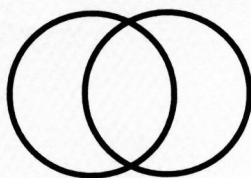
Recommended Citation

Teshuvah Institute Papers, "The Catholic Catechism on Jews and Judaism," edited by Lawrence E. Frizzell. South Orange, NJ: The Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies, 1996.

תשובה

Institute Paper

**The Catholic Catechism
on
Jews and Judaism**



**The Second
Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher
Memorial Lecture
October 30, 1994**

**The Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey 07079**

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This series of papers is entitled *Teshuvah*, “turning.” As “turning to God,” *teshuvah* is the biblical and rabbinical term for repentance. Here it bespeaks the re-vision, the re-orientation to which Vatican II, in its Statement on the Jews, summons Christian thought and action.

Foreword

Rabbi Jack Bemporad, the founding Director of the Center for Christian Jewish Understanding at Sacred Heart University (Bridgeport, Connecticut) offered the Second Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher Memorial Lecture on October 30, 1994. The text of his presentation and an introductory survey of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* are offered in print as a foundation for detailed analysis of this work, from which Catholic Bishops are to adapt this synthesis of the Church's teaching to the needs of their dioceses.

The concept of a new adult Catechism of the Catholic Church was announced a decade ago and Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher followed the discussion of the first draft with great interest. This lecture in memory of Monsignor Oesterreicher presents a theme that is central to Catholic-Jewish relations. The work of Rabbi Jack Bemporad is indeed impressive. Because he knows Italian and French, he was studying the Catechism before its appearance in English garb. He recognizes that this is not a document on Catholic-Jewish relations as such; however, he is aware of the importance of a proper synthesis of the Christian message for Catholics to be able to integrate the fresh vision of the Second Vatican Council regarding Jews and Judaism into daily life and worship.

Monsignor Oesterreicher labored valiantly to promote a deeper understanding among Catholics (and others) of the profound continuity of God's plan. Not only did he emphasize the need for the Church's teachers on every level to be imbued with a love of both Testaments of the biblical message; he also proclaimed the need for Catholics to know their Jewish brothers and sisters in their profession of a living faith. This should lead them to collaborate with Jewish leaders and their congregations in works of justice, mercy and peacemaking. "For all their differences, the Church and Judaism need not be antagonists, rather does the Covenant bind them to a common task, to a partnership before God" (*The Rediscovery of Judaism*, 1971, pp.17-18).

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Director

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Do you know people who try to keep up with all the best sellers? In our world that means being exposed to the novel and exciting trends of the day. But how many of these works will stand the test of time? Today we are reflecting on aspects of a best seller that replaces the Catechism of the Council of Trent (*Catechismus ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini*), published in 1566. This new Catechism may be brought up-to-date before 400 years have passed, but the purchaser has a solid tome that will not be replaced in the near future.

No doubt many can surmise that the term "catechism" was old long before the Council of Trent. It comes from a Greek verb meaning "to make (someone) hear" or "to instruct." Before the invention of the printing press the message would be proclaimed orally; in the early Church the catechism was a set of instructions for those seeking Baptism. In the Middle Ages, books were prepared to explain Christian faith and practice in a logical fashion. The areas upon which the catechism expounded were based on: 1.) the Creed (the Christian profession of faith), 2.) the Ten Commandments and lists of sins or vices, and 3.) the Lord's Prayer ("Our Father"). Simple and straightforward!

I. The "New Catechism"

For most of us, "the catechism" was learned in the form of questions and answers. In the English-speaking world, these were usually derived from the *Baltimore Catechism* (published in 1885) or the "*Penny Catechism*" (published in England in 1898). These texts offered a rather complete synthesis of the faith in terms that could be memorized by children, even if they did not fully understand. As they faced challenges of adult life, they would recall the response and apply it. How simple was the world of our grandparents!

No doubt you were impressed to see that this new Catechism is a book of 688 pages of text, plus 111 pages of indices.^[1] However, this is no sketch of the Catholic faith for children. It is a compendium of the Church's bimillennial wisdom, distilled to meet the needs of Catholics throughout the world, in very complex societies. Yet we bear the same flawed human nature that was shared by our ancestors. The Church wishes Catholics to have a synthesis of the teachings for us to know God, ourselves and other dimensions of creation. From this foundation educators will compose books of instruction for various levels and age groups.

In many ways, what the Church has done is similar to the process whereby the Mishnah was formed. The riches of the biblical heritage had been studied over generations and various aspects of the message were gathered into an orderly format. Of course, the tractates of the Mishnah emphasize orthopraxy, the right way of putting the commandments into practice. The Church has always looked first to the narratives that portray how Jesus lived the commandments and then postulated that Christians should seek to serve God in imitation of him. Nonetheless, this life rooted in faith is expressed not only in a general commandment to love God and neighbor (drawing on Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18) but also in the specific stipulations of the Decalogue and other commandments. All Christians sense a need for both the ideal model to follow and practical norms for concrete situations. At times, the situation demands an immediate response, and perhaps the ideal of how Jesus would have acted seems remote. So at the moment one is tempted to use the computer to embezzle funds or to defraud another, it is more logical to recall "Thou shalt not steal" than to search the Gospel to see what Jesus would have done.

II. Faith and the Creed: "The Profession of Faith"

Like the 13 Principles of Faith in the Jewish liturgy, the Creed is recited in the Catholic Mass as a faith-filled proclamation of principles upon which our life is based. Although some teachers of Judaism have declared that their religion has no dogmas, this was submitted to a sharp critique by Rabbi Solomon Schechter (1847-1915). "It is true that every great religion is 'a concentration of many ideas and ideals,' which make this religion able to adapt itself to various modes of thinking and living. But there must always be a point around which all these ideas concentrate themselves. This center is Dogma."^[2]

The essential elements of Christian faith were formulated in the West through the Apostles' Creed, whereas the teachers of the Eastern Mediterranean provided more comprehensive statements. The most familiar of these is the Nicæan Creed of 325, which is recited after the homily at Sunday Mass. The Catechism presents a study of the Creed in 12 articles (263 pages), which remind us of the 12 apostles, whose testimony in faith to the death-and-resurrection of Jesus is fundamental to the Church (see Acts 1:15-26).

The biblical heritage emphasizes that the Creator of the universe is the Lord of history. Jews and Christians express their faith, not merely as timeless truths about God but in terms of history and divine providence guiding the course of human events. This presence of God in history and in the life of each person is celebrated by William Cowper (1731-1800) in a poem, *Light Shining out of Darkness*.

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines,
With never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.
His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.*

Throughout a life marred by the terrible fear that he was damned, Cowper wrote eloquently of the mystery of divine mercy touching each individual personally, yet within the communion of saints, those consecrated in Baptism.^[3]

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

The sense of human puniness in face of the forces of nature and history prevails even though some people are convinced that "Man is the measure of all things;" rather than dwell on our limitations, the community of faith extols the majesty of God. "LORD, great and awesome God, you keep your merciful covenant toward those who love you and observe your commandments" (Daniel 9:4). The book of Daniel describes exceedingly troubled times, but is imbued with hope in God in spite of the darkness that seemed to envelope the chosen people. Christians grapple with similar experiences of human wickedness and persecution; they respond with a paradox: "The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength" (1 Cor 1:25). The Creed places the death-and-resurrection of Jesus at

the core of the Church's proclamation of faith. This is designated as the "Paschal Mystery" because this unique event of death-and-resurrection is elucidated in terms of the Passover (Pascha in Aramaic). The Exodus from Egypt is the paradigm for explaining all subsequent turning points in the history of the Covenant.

III. Celebration of the Paschal Mystery

As the Jewish people celebrate the Passover, not only with words of faith and praise, but also in the symbols of a sacred meal, so the Church's Creed is placed in the framework of worship. Part II of the Catechism is entitled "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery," wherein the seven sacraments are presented.

Faith is a divine gift, an insight into the profound meaning of human existence. Our span of time on earth embraces joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain. Each extreme can so focus our attention on the given moment that we may fail to see beyond the present to the sacred purpose of all life and of creation itself. The vision of a fuller reality of life as communion with the living God is experienced, not only in moments of personal prayer but above all in signs and gestures that speak to us as a community.

Thus, for Christians the plunge into waters of baptism not only becomes a vehicle of cleansing and refreshment, it is a new birth — a birth *from above* through the power of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:5-8). This new life must be fostered through breathing, that is a regular rhythm of prayer, and through nourishment, in the form of bread and wine taken up into the way Jesus celebrated the Last Supper.

Each of the Sacraments transforms the life of the individual believer, but must be experienced within the community of faith. The rites of passage coincide with the same moments as those celebrated by the Jewish people. Confirmation is the completion of the blessings of Baptism, maturing the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that each person may bear witness to Christ by word and deed (Catechism No. 1258). Those who enter the vocations of marriage and the priesthood receive sacraments which prepare them for a lifetime of loving service.

When the grim realities of sin and sickness invade human life, the sacraments of reconciliation (penance, confession) and anointing of the sick provide a spiritual healing so that the afflicted person may come to inner peace and bodily strength.

"Death be not proud ..." (John Donne, Sonnet X). Like the Jewish practice of *viddui* (public confession of sins), the Church stresses the importance of

reconciliation with God and neighbor before one faces death. At this solemn moment, Penance (confession), Anointing of the Sick and the Eucharist as *viaticum* (food for the journey) are the sacraments that strengthen us to complete this earthly pilgrimage. Difficult or tragic as the circumstances of death may be, the experience is taken up into the way the person has lived his or her faith. This is the "last Passover of the child of God, leading to the fullness of life in God's Kingdom" (Catechism No. 1680).

IV. "Life in Christ": Keeping the Commandments

The Paschal Mystery of Christ's death-and-resurrection provides the gifts that enable the Christian to live a new life. However, the gifts do not waft the person onto a level of existence that avoids all of the potholes and detours of the common human pilgrimage. The faculties of intellect and free will, human emotions and drives must be placed at the service of God. As Christians strive to cope with the ambiguities of human existence, they may pray, with St. Paul, that "thorns of the flesh" depart. However, they must recall the divine answer to that prayer: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:8-9). In other words, let God's strength shine through our feeble frame!

This third section of the Catechism reviews the biblical teaching that the dignity of each human person is grounded in the reality of being created in the divine image and likeness (Gen 1:26-28). The Jewish reflection on this truth is especially pertinent to our age. "A man stamps many coins with the one seal and they are all alike; but the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be he, has stamped every human being with the seal of the first man, yet not one of them is like his neighbor" (Mishnah Sanhedrin IV:5). By this doctrine of the basis for human dignity, we learn a healthy self-respect, which is the norm for the command to love our neighbor *as ourselves* (Lev 19:18). By marvelling at the wonderful variety among our neighbors we will respect others when they differ from ourselves.

Every human being has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The false roads that people travel in searching for this happiness are numerous but fall into three categories: possessions, pleasure and power. The Catechism defines happiness in terms of the Beatitudes (Matt 5:3-12), then discusses human freedom and its concomitant responsibilities, sin as an offense against reason, truth and right conscience and the relation between the individual and the human community, the Christian and the Church.

Already we have noted the ways in which the Catechism draws upon the Jewish Scriptures to elucidate the content of Christian doctrine. That approach draws upon the dictum of St. Augustine: "The New Testament lies hidden in

the Old, and the Old is made manifest in the New.” (*Novum in Vetere latet, Vetus in Novo patet*” Questions in Heptateuch 2, 73). The delight of Christians to find their Beloved throughout the Jewish Scriptures is expressed beautifully by William Cowper.

*Jesus I love to trace,
Throughout the sacred pages,
The footsteps of thy grace,
The same in every age!
O grant that I may faithful be
To clearer light vouchsafed to me.
(Old Testament Gospel, last verse).*

The millennial debates between Jews and Christians concerning the meaning of given biblical passages have not been resolved completely. However, from the time of Origen and Jerome in the third to fifth centuries, we have learned to respect the “Hebrew truth” over the Greek translations and to appreciate the Jewish ways of interpreting this text. Recent discoveries of the Qumran scrolls and Aramaic translations (*targumim*) from early times have given both Christians and Jews insights into the ways in which the Jewish Bible was interpreted during the late Second Temple period. Thus we can recognize that the methods applied by New Testament writers were not foreign to the tradition, even though the given interpretation might be new, focusing as it does on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Moving to the moral order and the application of the Decalogue to daily life, the Catechism continues the long tradition of seeing that the ten commandments govern all our relationships with God, neighbor, self, and the world in which we live. Without neglecting the insights of Jesus and the Christian community into the meaning and application of these commandments, the Church today can benefit greatly from the ways in which the Jewish people have understood and lived the Decalogue, indeed all 613 commandments.^[4]

The Catechism offers a rich fare for our reflection in its treatment of the moral order under the commandments. A few examples must suffice to encourage detailed study of the text. Under the first Commandment in St. Augustine’s division, idolatry is defined as divinizing anything that is not God. “Man commits idolatry whenever he honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (e.g. satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc.” Eschewing idolatry and the abuse of God’s Name, Christians are called to worship God both individually and in community. “The celebration of Sunday to render to God and outward, visible, public and regular worship ... Sunday worship fulfills the moral command of the Old Covenant, taking up its rhythm and spirit in the weekly celebration of the Creator and Redeemer of his people.” (Catechism No. 2176) Through this Christian practice, the introduction of a day of rest after six days of work has

constituted one of the great contributions made by Judaism to the modern world. Of course, the Church is aware that, in some cultures, this practice is being eroded. “Every Christian should avoid making unnecessary demands on others that would hinder them from observing the Lord’s Day.” (Catechism No. 2187)

The positive commandment to honor our parents provides a context for the Catechism to discuss the family in God’s plan and the reciprocal duties of children and their parents. Would that these principles become points of reflection in every Catholic home! Because the family is the basic unit of every society, the authority of the civil order and the duties of citizens are presented here as well.

Threats to human life are manifold, so the human responsibility to respect and foster life is studied under several headings: legitimate defense, intentional homicide, abortion, euthanasia and suicide. Then appreciation for the dignity of the person is presented: scandal as disrespect for others, respect for health, scientific research and respect for the individual, bodily integrity (rejecting terrorism and torture), and respect for the dead. The needs of society at large are developed by safeguarding peace and avoiding war.

The command to avoid adultery limits the sexual relationship to partners in marriage. The Catechism emphasizes the virtue of chastity, lists the various sins that compromise this personal integrity, and then presents the moral aspects of married love, complementing the teachings given under “the sacrament of matrimony.”

“You shall not steal!” The respect for person discussed earlier is now extended to their property and other goods, as well as for the integrity of all creation, with special reference to animals. The Church’s social doctrine and concern for the poor are included in this context.^[5]

The way to avoid false testimony is to live the truth and to bear witness to it. From the personal order the Catechism moves to the use of the communications media, which are to be placed at the service of the common good. This section is completed with reflections on “truth, beauty and sacred art.”

The Catholic tradition follows Deuteronomy (5:21) by dividing the commandment against coveting into two parts. The obligation not to covet a neighbor’s wife is the basis for the Catechism to present the ideals of purity and modesty, while declaring that “moral permissiveness rests on an erroneous conception of human freedom” (Catechism No. 2526). Envy and greed are sins against the commandment forbidding one to covet an neighbor’s goods.

This sketch, while not comprehensive, gives an idea of the way in which moral education can be offered, not merely as a list of “dos and don’ts,” but as a challenge to seek perfection in God’s service. “Commandments must

not be understood as a minimum limit beyond which one does not go, but rather as a path involving a moral and spiritual journey toward perfection, at the heart of which is love." (John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* No.15)

V. Christian Prayer

The Creed and the liturgy of the sacraments are community prayers but they do not exhaust the possibilities for the Christian to commune with God. The Catechism offers a succinct review of prayer throughout the Jewish Scriptures (paying special attention to Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah and the Psalms), the New Testament (focusing on Jesus and his Mother), and the age of the Church.

Thirty years ago, many young Christians and Jews turned to the ancient religions of the Orient in a search for contemplative prayer and mystical experience. How many even guessed that Judaism and Christianity possess extremely rich and varied traditions in these areas? The Catechism offers a brief but comprehensive survey of the forms of personal and group prayer. Of course, this can be expanded by introducing the schools of spirituality that are fostered by several religious orders and other communities. May those searching for deeper knowledge of God and ways of intensifying their spiritual life become aware of the treasures in their own tradition!

As in classical treatises from the early Church and down through the centuries, the Catechism concludes with a detailed reflection on the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13) and the doxology drawn from Jewish practice that completes it. Unfortunately, this study of the "Our Father" does not explain its roots in the Jewish tradition or allude to parallels in Jewish prayers from the Second Temple period. As Asher Finkel has shown, the petitions are shared but Jesus shows creativity in the way he arranged them. The petitions in the Eighteen Benedictions move from the concerns of daily life to the eschatological goal of life, whereas Jesus has placed the Kingdom first and ordered all else to it.^[6]

How have Christians at prayer viewed the Jewish community? All too often the evidence is far from positive, but that is subject for another paper.^[7] I would like to present a poem of George Herbert (1593-1633), an Anglican divine who lived in England not long before Oliver Cromwell permitted the Jews to return to "that fair and pleasant land." Except when going abroad, Herbert and his contemporaries may not have met a Jew.^[8]

The Jews

*Poor nation, whose sweet sap, and juice
Our scions have purloined, and left you dry:
Whose streams we got by the Apostles' sluice,
And use in baptism, while ye pine and die:
Who by not keeping once, became a debtor;
And now by keeping lose the letter:*

*O that my prayers! mine, alas!
O that some Angel might a trumpet sound;
At which the Church falling upon her face
Should cry so loud, until the trump were drowned,
And by that cry of her dear Lord obtain,
That your sweet sap might come again!*

The poverty of the Jewish people and their seeming lack of vitality are attributed by the poet to an usurpation of their treasures by Christianity. This judgment flows from a theological judgment that the Christian faith and the Church succeeded and superseded the Jewish people in God's plan. Like the prophets of old, he accuses the Jews of once failing to keep the commandments — and now their observances are interpreted by the Christian poet to miss the point of God's purpose. Yet, the living waters of Baptism come from the Jewish wellspring. Since the Second Vatican Council Catholics are taught to eschew this prejudicial approach to sacred history.

Herbert would see the situation rectified through his prayers and the humble intercession of the Church, that the spiritual life of the Jewish community be revitalized. The metaphor, "sweet sap and juice," evokes the image of a tree, and perhaps the poet was thinking of the good olive tree of the Jewish people, onto which Gentiles are grafted through Baptism (Rom 11:17-19, 24). Is Herbert considering this revivification of the Jewish people to come only at the end of time? Herbert might be referring to that solemn hour, to be heralded by an angelic trumpet-call (1 Thess 4:16). However, it would be unreasonable for Herbert to think the Church's intercession at that time would drown out the angelic call. So he must be imaging a conciliatory act by the Church that would touch the heart of Jews before the final day. In any case, in spite of the assessment that the Jews are bereft of spiritual gifts, the vision is rather benign, within the limits of the age in which he lived. The Second Vatican Council called for dialogue and cooperation between Catholics and Jews, and placed the Church on the road to recognition of the ongoing vitality of Judaism and the Jewish people.^[9] It looks forward with the prophets and New Testament writers, to a time when all would serve the one God with one accord (*Nostra Aetate* No. 4, quoting Zeph 3:9). How and when? Those questions, we leave to God's mysterious ways and bright designs.

VI. Conclusion

For many centuries the Jewish and Christian communities have sought to serve God and to educate their adherents by prayer and study that move into action, in deeds of justice and love. Tragically, they were so alienated that they failed to learn from each other and often viewed the other community as a hostile competitor. The cost of this ignorance and animosity is incalculable and is beyond the scope of this paper. However, these days bring a new beginning in the Church's effort to understand her roots and to appreciate the Jewish faith and the Jewish people. Has the vision of the Second Vatican Council been integrated into the new Catechism of the Catholic Church? This is one of the questions that will be addressed by Rabbi Jack Bemporad. I am confident that we will benefit greatly from his insights.

Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell

Notes

- [1] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994).
- [2] S. Schechter, "The dogmas of Judaism," *Studies in Judaism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958) p. 104.
- [3] See Virginia Stem Owens, "The dark side of grace," *Christianity Today* (July 19, 1993) pp. 32-35.
- [4] See my article, "Law at the service of humankind," *SIDIC 19* (No. 3-1986) pp. 4-7.
- [5] In No. 2449, the Catechism quotes John 12:8 ("The poor you always have with you...") correctly as an application of Deut 15:11. The understanding of Jesus' message is clearer in Mark 14:7. "The poor you will always have with you, *and whenever you will you can do good to them...*"
- [6] A. Finkel, "The prayer of Jesus in Matthew," *Standing Before God: Studies ... in honor of John M. Oesterreicher* (ed. A. Finkel and L.E. Frizzell. New York: Ktav, 1981)p.131-170. See also, Jakob J. Petuchowski, "A Rabbi looks at the Lord's Prayer," *New Visions: Historical and Theological Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Ed. V.A. McInnes. New York: Crossroad, 1993) pp. 95-114.
- [7] See my forthcoming essay with J. Frank Henderson, "Jews and Judaism in the Medieval Latin Liturgy" in the *The Medieval Liturgy and Society* (ed. Thomas Heffernan and E. Ann Matter).
- [8] For a discussion of the Jewish Scriptures in Herbert's poetry, see Chana Bloch, *Spelling the Word: George Herbert and the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and Michael C. Schoenfeldt, *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship* (Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1991). Neither treats this poem.
- [9] See John M. Oesterreicher, *The Rediscovery of Judaism: A Re-Examination of the Conciliar Statement on the Jews* (South Orange: The Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies, 1971).

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Philip A. Cunningham, *Education for Shalom: Religion Textbooks and the Enhancement of the Catholic and Jewish Relationship* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995).

Avery Dulles, "The challenge of the Catechism," *First Things* 49 (January 1995) pp. 46-53.

Eugene J. Fisher, Leon Klenicki and others, "The New Catholic Catechism and the Jews," *SIDIC Review* (Sisters of Sion, Rome) 27 (No. 2 -1994). See Katherine T. Hargrove (ed.), *Seeds of Reconciliation: Essays on Jewish-Christian Understanding* (N. Richland Hills, Texas: BIBAL Press, 1996) pp. 205-231.

Bernard L. Marthaler (ed.), *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Traditional Themes and Contemporary Issues* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1994).

Gerard S. Sloyan, "A theological and pastoral critique of Catechism of the Catholic Church," *Horizons* 21 (1994) pp. 159-171.

Gerard S. Sloyan, "The use of the Bible in a new resource book," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25 (1995, 3-13).

Note: Readers should consult the major Catholic theological journals from other countries, as most have given considerable attention to the "new Catechism." The perspectives offered will remind us that this document is intended for the Church Universal. Reactions and interpretations from theologians and catechists in other lands will enrich us in many ways.

The Universal Catechism's Teaching on the Jews and Judaism in the Context of the Documents Stemming From Vatican II and the Statements of Pope John Paul II

I consider your invitation to deliver this second Monsignor Oesterreicher lecture a great honor whose challenge fills me with a mixture of enthusiasm and trepidation.

Enthusiasm, since I am a great admirer of Monsignor Oesterreicher and consider his accomplishments truly outstanding and remarkable in what is one of the most important challenges of our time: understanding and reconciliation between Christians and Jews. The great work that Monsignor Oesterreicher accomplished, in his writings and teachings and through the unique and most important Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies here at Seton Hall University achieved a level of erudition and originality that leaves us all breathless.

Monsignor Oesterreicher had the good fortune to play an important role in the work of the Second Vatican Council. His life is testimony to the power that this document has had in bridging Christians and Jews, leading them to further understanding and respect.

Trepidation, since I am fully aware of my limitations and I know how much he cared about this work of reconciliation and I want my contribution to be on a caliber that he would have appreciated.

I must also admit that I feel a sense of trepidation knowing that I follow the first Oesterreicher memorial lecturer, my very dear friend and colleague Dr. Eugene Fisher, who has spent his life working in this area of Jewish-Christian relations; and all of us are in his debt.

To be associated with such outstanding scholars and to be able to participate in the work of this outstanding Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies is indeed a great honor for me.

Monsignor Oesterreicher had a vision of dialogue. It required first and foremost, mutual respect. Dialogue's purpose is to bring about mutual understanding which reinforced and never denied the integrity of both parties.

What was needed was a dialogue which strove to understand the other as he or she understood the self and take the additional step of seeing oneself through the eyes of the other. It was the great Sage Hillel who said, "Do not judge your fellow human being until you stand in his or her place" (Mishnah

Abot II:5). I would add, in addition, once you stand in the other's place, then try to see how the other sees you. It is then that one can be truly participating in the mental and emotional framework of the other, and then that we can fully see how we are seen.

It is to Monsignor Oesterreicher's credit that this was the ideal he set for himself in dialogue and which he exemplified to us during his many years here at this great university with its fine faculty, its impressive library and its atmosphere of learning and respect for truth.

For those who may not be aware of the writing and thinking of Monsignor Oesterreicher, I feel impelled to quote from one of his many thoughtful writings, the essay entitled *The Martyrs of the Decalogue*.

In Jewish circles we have heard it said by scholars like Emil Fackenheim and writers like Elie Wiesel that a 614th Commandment issued from Auschwitz. This commandment summons us not to give Hitler a posthumous victory.

I have often thought that, while this affirmation has intense emotional appeal, it must be seen in its proper context. It is not simply that Hitler should not win — that barbarism and tyranny and malignant nationalism not win out — but rather that Judaism and all that Judaism stands for should not lose or disappear. In this respect what Monsignor Oesterreicher has written in his very moving essay, *Martyrs of the Decalogue*, deserves to be quoted in full.

He states, "My thesis on the origin of Hitler's contempt for the Jewish people is based on his life as a whole, on the sum total of his words and works; yet it is expressly supported by several of his 'pronouncements.' His table talks from the years 1932 to 1934, in the presence of one of Danzig's major office bearers, Hermann Rauschnig, are a veritable storehouse of the Fuehrer's opinions on a variety of topics, particularly on faith, worship, Judaism, and Christianity. Here are some of his dicta which prove his awareness of, and inveterate repugnance to, the theological significance of the Jewish people. Hitler is quoted as saying:

*We are now at the end of the Age of Reason.
The intellect ... has become a disease of life.
Our revolution is not merely political or
social; we are at the outset of a tremendous overthrow
of moral ideas and of Man's spiritual orientation ...
The tablets of Mount Sinai have lost their validity.
Conscience is a Jewish invention; like circumcision,
it mutilates Man ...
There is no such thing as truth ...
One must distrust mind and conscience; one must place
one's trust in one's instincts.*

Monsignor Oesterreicher continues, "Since all tenets rejected in this 'proclamation' are associated with Jews and Judaism, indeed derive from them, Hitler had to see in the Jews his archenemies.

"Whether the lives of individual Jews conform to the Commandments or not, Jews in their totality, that is, as covenanted people, stand for God's claim on all humanity, each person and the whole community ...

"The Jews were an invisible phalanx, standing in the way of the amoral society he wished to build, a society based, not on the distinction between good and evil, but on the 'Aryan instinct' or the drive of Nietzsche's *Blond Beast*. Their very being spoiled his dream of becoming the architect of that new world, the creator of a society in which biblical values — the Ten Commandments, first of all — were 'outlawed.' As spoilers of his scheme, they had to be done away with. Even their memory was to be eradicated. Thus the Jews who died as Hitler's victims unwittingly bore testimony to the Ten Commandments. They are and will be for all times '*Martyrs of the Decalogue*'."

We see from the above quotation all that Hitler identified with Judaism. We also see that Hitler must have understood that Christianity equally stood by and stands by those values that he hated and condemned. Indeed the historian Robert Weistrich in his book *Antisemitism - The Longest Hatred* states, "Nazism itself became contaminated with a profound Christophobia, decrying Christianity as a 'Semitic' religion which was emasculating the healthy, heroic and warrior virtues of the German people with its preaching of the virtues of humility, compassion, charity and love." (p. 68)

Monsignor Oesterreicher clearly perceived the strong historic links between Judaism and Christianity. He was deeply distressed that so much misunderstanding and antagonism existed between the two religions and he devoted his life to the work of understanding and reconciliation. I must add, that in this work he had the able help of Father Frizzell, the present Director of The Institute for Judaeo-Christian Studies, along with Father John Morley, Professor in Seton Hall's Department of Religious Studies. Their work is also an inspiration to all of us.

Anyone familiar with the many statements made by Pope John Paul II with respect to dialogue and inter-religious understanding can see the common perspective shared by Pope John Paul and Monsignor Oesterreicher.

I. Dialogue and Its Prerequisites

In his presentation to the delegates to the meeting of representatives of Episcopal Conferences and other experts in Catholic-Jewish relations on March 6, 1982, the Pope outlined what he felt were the goals to be achieved in

Catholic teaching with respect to Jews and Judaism. He stated, "We should aim, in this field, that Catholic teaching at its different levels, in catechesis to children and young people, presents Jews and Judaism, not only in an honest and objective manner, free from prejudices and without any offenses, but also with full awareness of the heritage we have sketched above."

The heritage the Pope was referring to was all that the Church owes to the people of Israel. Not only "the Patriarchs, Moses and the Prophets" but also, quoting Paul, Israel who "have the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the worship and the promises, who have the fathers, and from whom is Christ according to the flesh." (Rom 9:4-5)

The Pope was pointing out that Christians should in no sense minimize the heritage of Monotheism and all it entails as an achieved possession of Judaism incorporated into Christianity.^[1]

The Pope asked that Judaism be depicted fairly and that the debt that Christianity owes Judaism be acknowledged. The Pope, however, did not leave it at that in his talk. He spoke further of a mysterious design on the part of God which connects the Jewish people and the Church and he spoke of a "close collaboration towards which our common heritage directs us, in service of man and his vast spiritual and material needs. Through different, but finally convergent ways, we will be able to reach, with the help of the Lord who has never ceased to love his people (see Rom 11:1) this true brotherhood in reconciliation and respect and to contribute to a full implementation of God's plan in history."

In his conception of a divine plan, the Pope clearly rejects any view of Judaism which sees it as a fossil or stunted, unable to continue to bear witness and be creative religiously.

As to the past checkered history, the Pope told the representatives of the Episcopal Conferences that "Relations between our two communities have been marked by the misunderstandings and resentments with which we are all familiar. And if, since the day of the separation there have been misunderstandings, errors, indeed offenses, it is now our task to leave these behind with understanding, peace and mutual respect. The Pope then added, **"The terrible persecutions suffered by the Jews in different periods of history have finally opened the eyes of many and appalled many people's hearts. Christians have taken the right path, that of justice and brotherhood, in seeking to come together with their Semitic brethren, respectfully and perseveringly, in the common heritage, a heritage that all value so highly."** (Emphasis added.)

In the Pope's first meeting with representatives of the Jewish community, he outlined a number of issues which were to take on broader and clearer definiteness.

He quoted *Nostra Aetate*, "While searching into the mystery of the Church it (the Council) recalled a spiritual bond linking the people of the new covenant with Abraham's stock;" the Pope continued, "Thus it understood that our two religious communities are **connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities.**" It is this very connection, that makes it incumbent on both faiths, "to fulfill God's commandment of love, and to sustain a truly fruitful and fraternal dialogue that contributes to the good of each of the partners involved and to our better service of humanity."

After establishing the indissoluble connection for Christians of Judaism with Christianity he then gave full assent to the prologue of the Guidelines of Religious Relations with the Jews (December 1, 1974), which asked Christians to strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism: "They [Christians] must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience."

But the Pope wanted to emphasize that as essential as it is for Christians to understand Jews and Judaism especially in the terms with which they define themselves, it is equally necessary for Jews to understand the Church and Christians.

Dialogue and communication is needed in order not to distort the other. The Pope said to the Jewish delegation, "You are here I believe to help us in our reflection on Judaism. **And I am sure that we find in you and in the communities you represent, a real and deep disposition to understand Christianity and the Catholic Church in its proper identity today so that we may work from both sides toward our common aim of overcoming every kind of prejudice and discrimination.**" (Emphasis added.)

The Pope clearly recognized that dialogue is mutual and understanding or the attempt to understand must also be mutual if real dialogue is to take place. But dialogue is not enough, true and genuine reconciliation must be achieved. Yes, full "mutual understanding" must be striven for but even more, the Pope feels that reconciliation would be the will of God. The Pope said, "It is for him (God) to give to both religious communities, so near to each other, that reconciliation and effective love which are at the same time his command and his gift. In this sense, I believe, each time that the Jew recites the '*Shema Yisrael*', each time that Christians recall the first and second great commandments, we are by God's grace, brought nearer to each other."

The Pope fully recognizes the distinctive quality of each faith and its integrity, there is no blending here, no collapsing of Judaism into Christianity. The *Shema* will still be the affirmation of the one God for Jews but it will be indissolubly linked to the Christians' affirmation of the first two commandments.

In elaborating on this concept of what connects and what separates our two traditions and the connection of our respective religious identities the Pope stated to the Jewish community in Paris on May 31, 1980, that this means that this relationship must be "further deepened and enriched by study, mutual knowledge, religious education on both sides and the effort to overcome the difficulties that still exist."

To the Jewish community in São Paulo, he added, "Jews and Catholics strive to deepen the common biblical heritage **without however trying to conceal the differences which separate us and in this way a renewed mutual knowledge can lead to a more adequate presentation of each religion in the teaching of the other.**" (*Emphasis added.*)

In his speech to the delegates of Episcopal Conferences on March 6, 1982, the Pope explicitly spelled out what reconciliation meant. He stated, "It should not be confused with a sort of religious relativism, still less with a loss of identity ... May God allow Christians and Jews really to come together, to arrive at an exchange in depth founded on their respective identities, but never blurring it on either side, truly searching the will of God the revealer."

II. The Universal Catechism

With the possible exception of the documents of Vatican II, no document will have as much influence on Catholics worldwide as the Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church. Its authoritative character is clearly set forth in the Pope's introduction to the text. There the Pope states that the Catechism is "a statement of the Church's faith and of Catholic doctrine ... I declare it to be a **sure norm for teaching the faith and thus a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion.**" Further down the Pope continues that the Catechism is "**a sure and authentic reference text for teaching Catholic doctrine and particularly for preparing local Catechisms.**" (p. 5) (*Emphasis added.*)

As an authoritative text, the Catechism is being taught and preached on all over the country. Indeed, the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding will be holding seminars all over the United States on the Catechism in cooperation with a number of dioceses to help understand and implement its teachings on Jews and Judaism.

It is my understanding that a detailed study of the Catechism is taking place or will take place shortly in other parts of the world, so that the imprint of the teachings of the Catechism will reach far and wide throughout the Catholic and non-Catholic world since much interest has been expressed in its contents also among Protestants and Jews and even Oriental religionists.

Since the Catechism is to function as a guide for the formation of local catechisms and is to be adapted to "differences of culture, ages, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed" and since "such indispensable adaptations are the responsibility of particular catechisms and, even more, of those who instruct the faithful" (p.11), it is of utmost importance that its teachings on Jews and Judaism be reflected on in dialogues between Catholics and Jews so that such adaptations be done in the spirit of honesty and mutual brotherly esteem.

It is, therefore, of the utmost importance for us to ask whether the Catechism is in the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*, its Guidelines and the Notes,^[2] embodying their innovations in its pages. It is also important to ask whether the wise words of Pope John Paul II are manifest in its teachings. It is to these questions that we now turn.

Before dealing with the way in which the Catechism deals with Jews and Judaism, it is important to state clearly at the outset that the Catechism is in no sense a treatise on Judaism or primarily concerned with Judaism. It is an authoritative formulation of Catholic faith in a form that is coherent, comprehensive and applicable to the life of faith of Catholics.

The Catechism deals with issues relating to Jews and Judaism as it attempts to clarify the Catholic faith and finds that clarification to be possible only in relation to the faith, history and teachings of Judaism. As such, it is not interested in Judaism in itself or for itself, but in Judaism for Catholics and in relation to Catholic teachings and beliefs.

III. The Teaching of Contempt

In reading the Catechism, the first question which anyone concerned with the attitude towards Jews and Judaism asks is, "How does the Catechism handle the many scriptural statements that have been used traditionally to express what the great French Jewish scholar, Jules Isaac, referred to as "the teaching of contempt?"^[3]

Not to leave you in suspense, let me state that all those statements in the New Testament and in Catholic tradition which were hostile to Jews as such and formed the basis for the teaching of contempt are not included or referred to in the Catechism. The one most quoted statement from the Gospel of Matthew, which could not be ignored, is interpreted so as to reject any anti-Semitic interpretation.

You may wonder why after the Vatican Council and the Guidelines and the Notes, as well as the many positive and courageous statements of Pope John Paul II, in particular his visit to the synagogue of Rome in 1986, there is

any need to review this dismal history. It is important to do so since these writings and speeches are not generally read by Catholic lay people.

Unfortunately, the revolution in Catholic thinking is the province of all too few and with the Catechism already having sold millions of copies and continuing to sell, it will have the most significant and far reaching influence on all who read it, Christians and non-Christians alike.

Let us refresh our memories as to the concerns of Jules Isaac. He was concerned with three fundamental teachings that constituted for him "the teaching of contempt."

First and foremost was the charge of deicide, then the ensuing condemnation of the Jews as being of the devil and doing the devil's work. Concomitant with that is the teaching that the Jews have been rejected by God and that the "New Israel" formed by the new covenant has annulled and replaced the old. Taking these assertions in reverse order, it is most significant that the Catechism clearly and categorically rejects any annulment or rejection of the covenant with Israel. Section 63 states, "Israel is the priestly people of God 'called by the name of the Lord' and the first to hear the word of God the people of 'elder brethren' in the faith of Abraham." The affirmation that the people of Israel are in the present tense, not were in the past, the people of God is reaffirmed throughout the Catechism and is bolstered by the affirmation in the section dealing specifically with the Jews in the statement of Paul in Romans that the Covenant with Israel is "irrevocable" (See Sections 839-40;2173;522;121).

Similarly, the Catechism nowhere quotes the passage from John. You may remember it states, "Your father is the devil and you choose to carry out your father's desires" (John 8:44). This verse is referred to in the Catechism but only by way of authenticating the existence of the Devil. It is not used otherwise. The most grievous text, however, for anti-Semitic purposes is the verse from Matthew (27:25) which states that after Pontius Pilate washes his hands as to take no responsibility for Jesus' death, the people shouted, "His blood be on us and on our children." Here the Catechism specifically refers to the people as "a manipulated crowd" and also refers to "the personal sin of the participants (Judas, the Sanhedrin, Pilate) as known to God alone."

The Catechism here reaffirms the rejection of the accusation of deicide made by the Second Vatican Council which stated, "Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion ... the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from Holy Scriptures."

The Catechism then continues in the very next section 598, "The Church has never forgotten that sinners were the authors and the ministers of all the sufferings that the divine redeemer endured. Taking into account the fact that

our sins affect Christ Himself, the Church does not hesitate to impute to Christians the gravest responsibility for the torments inflicted upon Jesus, a responsibility with which they have all too often burdened the Jews alone."

The Roman Catechism of 1566 had already made the point that those who profess to know Christ are more guilty of the Crucifixion than those who did not understand or profess to know him. The Catechism states, "We, however, profess to know him, and when we deny him by our deeds we in some way seem to lay violent hands on him. Nor did demons crucify him, it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins." It has often been objected that in Christian and other writings the tactic of making all the Christians good, sons of 'light,' and all the Jews as bad without qualification, furthers the teaching of contempt. This tactic as we have seen is expressly repudiated in the passage dealing with the Crucifixion wherein Christians are charged with greater responsibility. This is also acknowledged in other places in the Catechism. For example, in section 401 it states, "Even after Christ's atonement, sin raises its head in countless ways among Christians." In short, Christians are not exempt from sin.

In addition to the deicide charge, Jules Isaac noted a second cause of the teaching of contempt, the non-recognition of the debt that Christianity owed Judaism. Including the realization that Jesus was a Jew, the Apostles, Mary, as well as Paul, Isaac felt this was an injustice to the truth of the New Testament itself. Here the Catechism goes a long way to rectify any injustice or misunderstanding.

Section 531 referring to Jesus states, "His religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the Law of God." This section fully incorporates the statement in the Notes (III 1) that "Jesus was and always remained a Jew."

The pagans as embodied in the Magi come to Israel as the place the Messiah is awaited and to the Jewish people. Section 528 states that "Pagans can discover Jesus and worship him as son of God and savior of the world only by turning toward the Jews and receiving from them the Messianic promise as contained in the Old Testament." Here we see that the validity and importance of the Hebrew Scriptures are foundational for Christianity and indeed any temptation toward a Marcionistic or Gnostic rejection of the Hebrew Bible is explicitly repudiated. Section 121 states, "the Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value, for the old covenant has never been revoked." Indeed Section 123 states, "Christians venerate the Old Testament as true word of God. The Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void (Marcionism)."

While it is true that the Church in order to be true to itself must "read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen ... it must not make us forget that the Old Testament retains its own intrinsic value as revelation."

This section summarizes the teaching in the Notes which affirms, "There is a Christian reading of the Old Testament which does not necessarily coincide with the Jewish reading. Thus Christian identity and Jewish identity should be carefully distinguished in their respective reading of the Bible. But this detracts nothing from the value of the Old Testament in the Church and does nothing to hinder profiting discerningly from the traditions of Jewish reading." (Notes II 6)

Third, Jules Isaac called for the recognition of the spiritual significance of rabbinic Judaism. Isaac states, "Everything at this period attests to the depth and intensity of the religious life of Israel" (*Teaching of Contempt*, p. 150).

On this issue, the new Catechism also makes major headway in clearing up the relationship of Jesus to the Pharisees, who are the predecessors of rabbinic Judaism.

Fortunately, the previously monolithic view that the Pharisees were, across the board, antagonistic to Jesus and his message has been relinquished. In Section 574, we see that only "certain Pharisees and partisans of Herod together with priests and scribes [which is not to say 'all' priests and scribes] agreed together to destroy him."

More explicitly, Section 575 states that "Christ's relations with the Pharisees were not exclusively polemical. Some Pharisees warned him of the danger he was courting; Jesus praises some of them, like the scribe of Mark 12:34, and dines several times at their homes. Jesus endorses some of the teachings imparted by this religious elite of God's people: the resurrection of the dead, certain forms of piety (almsgiving, fasting, and prayer), the custom of addressing God as Father, and the centrality of the commandment to love God and neighbor."

We might add much to this list, such as Pharisaic identification of Messiah and suffering servant.

The Rabbis were the ones to make the affirmation of the unity of God central in Jewish prayer, the Shema. Also, it is important to note that martyrology originated and became central in rabbinic Judaism and was taken over by the Church.

This, however, is not to obscure real differences between them, and hence, real differences between Catholics and Jews. Section 588, mentions that "Jesus scandalized the Pharisees by eating with tax collectors and sinners

as familiarly as with themselves," affirming "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Nevertheless, Section 595 affirms, referring to Jn 12:42; cf. 7:50; 9:16-17; 10:19-21; 19:38-39 that "a great many priests were obedient to the faith" and "Some believers ... belonged to the party of the Pharisees" to the point that, in reference to Acts 6:7, 15:5; in 21:20, James could tell Paul, "How many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; and they are all zealous for the Law."

Similarly, the new Catechism characterizes the relationship between Jesus and the Temple in fresh terms. Section 583 says explicitly that "like the prophets before him Jesus expressed the deepest respect for the Temple in Jerusalem." "At age 12, he decided to remain in the Temple to remind his parents that he must be about his Father's business."

Section 584 states that "Jesus went up to the Temple as the privileged place of encounter with God ... He drove merchants out of it because of jealous love for his Father: 'You shall not make my Father's house a house of trade.' " Quoting still, "After his Resurrection his apostles retained their reverence for the Temple."

Section 586, states in no uncertain terms that Jesus was "far from having been hostile to the Temple, where he gave the essential part of his teaching." And of course, this is carried to its Christological interpretation, that Jesus fully "identified himself with the Temple by presenting himself as God's definitive dwelling-place among men."

The new Catechism portrays Jesus as a good and religiously observant Jew.

With respect to the liturgy, Section 1096 gives ample credit to the Jewish liturgy not only of the past but "as professed and lived even now can help our better understanding of certain aspects of Christian liturgy."

On the Eucharist (Sections 1328ff; 1334; 1340) the Catechism shows its intrinsic connection to the "Jewish Blessing" as well as the "Jewish Meal" indeed the Jews' daily bread "is the fruit of the promised land, the pledge of God's faithfulness to his promises." Similarly, the Psalms are praised as "the book in which the word of God becomes man's prayer." (Section 2587)

But most of all, Jules Isaac felt that the close bond that existed between Jews and Christians, between Christianity and Judaism, was betrayed by the teaching of contempt and that only by correcting this erroneous teaching could the true intimate relationship between the two religions be recognized.

IV. Issue of Salvation and Supersessionism

Here it is necessary to ask and answer a fundamental question. Must the language of fulfillment incorporate the language of supersessionism? If so, then Jules Isaac's dream of close relationships would not be possible.

It is hardly possible for the Church to be true to itself and not adopt the language of fulfillment. Such language is part and parcel of the New Testament and it is the foundation of the Christian faith. To abandon such language is to radically redefine traditional Catholicism. While it is true, that there are a number of scholars and theologians who believe this should be done, such a change will require as great a revolution, if not greater than Vatican II. Since to ask a Catechism which is to carry on the teachings and doctrines of the Catholic faith to so totally revise Biblical and Catholic teaching is premature since these issues must first be debated and formulated and agreed upon by the proper bodies in the Church. Therefore, to ask the Catechism to break new ground is unrealistic. The question is, rather, has the Catechism incorporated the new ground that has been assimilated and has become Church teaching as a result of Vatican II and subsequent Church documents as well as the authoritative statements of the Pope?

Granting then that the Church must adopt the language of fulfillment, the issue then is, must the language of fulfillment be also necessarily the language of supersessionism? That is, can one be one without the other? In order to clarify this question, we must first try to understand what fulfillment is and what supersessionism is, and the best way to achieve that is by raising the issue of salvation as embodied in the Catechism.

However, again not to leave you in suspense all one needs to do is compare the *Baltimore Catechism* with the present Catechism to see the monumental difference between what was and what is. As you can see, the *Baltimore Catechism* is supersessionist in the sense that it is rejectionist. The present Catechism is not supersessionist at all. It embodies fulfillment theology and not supersessionist theology.

The *Baltimore Catechism* asks in Q. 391, "Why did the Jewish religion, which up to the death of Christ had been the true religion, cease at that time to be the true religion?"

A. "The Jewish religion, which, up to the death of Christ, had been the true religion, ceased at that time to be the true religion, because it was only a promise of the redemption and figure of the Christian religion, and when the redemption was accomplished and the Christian religion established by the death of Christ, the promise and the figure were no longer necessary." Here we have supersessionism and rejectionism. As we shall see, in dealing with the issue of salvation, the Church rejects all supersessionism.

V. The Issue of Salvation

Section 776 states it forthrightly, "The Church is Christ's instrument. She is taken up by him also as the instrument for the salvation of all." Indeed the prologue to the entire Catechism quotes Acts 4:12 "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (than the name of Jesus)." Incidentally, it is for this reason that the Catechism explicitly rejects any revelations that claim to have gone beyond the fulfillment in Jesus. Section 67 states, "Christian faith cannot accept 'revelations' that claim to surpass or correct the revelation of which Christ is the fulfillment, as is the case in certain non-Christian religions and also in certain recent sects which base themselves on such revelations." I think it is safe to infer that here the Catechism has Islam in mind and also perhaps Mormonism.

There is no point adding up quotations; throughout the Catechism it is repeatedly stated that the full realization and fulfillment of the truth is in Christ and in his Church which is the Catholic Church. The fullness of salvation for the Catechism is in and through the Catholic Church, but the Catechism does not ignore, nor fail to confront what historically has been a significant dogma that "outside the Church there is no salvation" (page 224 following section 845). The Catechism in Section 846 asks, "How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Reformulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is His Body." The Catechism then continues, "basing itself on Scripture and tradition, the Council teaches that the Church ... is necessary for salvation: The one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; He is present to us in His body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through Baptism as through a door. Hence, they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it."

The next section 847 continues, "This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church: Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience — those too may achieve eternal salvation" (cf. Section 1260). (*Emphasis added.*)

This granting of salvation to all individuals of good faith, in no sense diminishes the obligation of the Church or takes away its "sacred right to evangelize all men;" in other words this recognition that all human beings can be saved if their intentions are such that through the light of reason they strive

to do God's will and act ethically, as Section 55 states, "For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well doing." Nevertheless, the Church is obliged to engage in missionizing for the full truth to be made manifest to all.

The "Missionary Task" it is essential to add, "implies a **respectful dialogue** (in text) with those who do not yet accept the Gospel" (Section 856).

There are repeated references in the Catechism to "God's plan of salvation" and that plan in the Church's understanding envisages a time when all human beings will be fulfilled in Christ and the biblical promises of God's kingdom will be achieved.

How do the Jews fit into all this? First of all, it is explicitly stated that the Jews will be included in this final realization. Section 674 states, "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.'" The context of this section makes it very clear, however, **that the reference is in the future, to the second coming of Christ** (to which the prior Section 673 and the very next section 675 allude). (*Emphasis added.*)

As is also that segment of the Catechism dealing with the Jewish people (beginning with Section 839) which states:

Her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish people 'the first to hear the word of God.' The Jewish Faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Testament. To the Jews 'belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ,' for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable.'

The very next section, 840 continues:

and when one considers the future, God's people of the old covenant and the new people of God tend towards similar goals: expectation of the coming (or the return) of the Messiah. But one awaits the return of the Messiah who died and rose from the dead and is recognized as Lord and Son of God; the other awaits the coming of a Messiah, whose features remain hidden till the end of time; and the latter waiting is accompanied by the drama of not knowing or of misunderstanding Christ Jesus.

It seems to me that the Jews are conceived as being there with the Church up till the end when the full mystery of revelation and salvation is fulfilled. Hence, these texts make it very clear why in the Pope's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, which deals with the Church's mission and is quoted extensively throughout the Catechism, there is no mention of the Jews and why active missionizing to the Jews has not been practiced by the Church.

Let us summarize.

Salvation in the full and final sense, according to the Catechism, is through Christ and the Church. The Church cannot abandon its missionary task, albeit it must conduct its mission in a respectful manner and in no way use coercive or forceful measures, but by example. As to the Jews, they are combined with the Church in a Divine Plan of which the Apostle Paul spoke of and which must be respected. This plan which will find its fulfillment at the end of days, when it is expected Christ will return, is also to be fulfilled by the Jews attending to this event in expectation of "a Messiah" which the Jews erroneously believe not to be the Christ of the Church. But this waiting is to be accepted as part of the Divine Plan. Till then it must be understood that the Biblical claims as to the "Chosen People" embodied in Scripture and especially in Paul's epistle to the Romans stand firm. The Jews **are** the people of God. Theirs is the "sonship, the glory, the covenants ... for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable."

To help us in understanding this whole question of salvation, it will be helpful to review the passages in the Catechism that relate the "Stages of Revelation" wherein the relationship between God and Israel is discussed. (Sections 54-64)

First of all Sections 54 and 55 state that the self-revelation of God to Man "was not broken off by our first parents' sin. After the fall (God) buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption; and he has never ceased to show his solicitude for the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to those who seek salvation by patience in well doing." The Covenant with Noah remains in force until the proclamation of the Gospel for the Gentiles (58).

The Covenant with Abraham is the means by which all the nations of the Earth will be blessed (59). The text continues, "The people descended from Abraham would be the trustees of the promise made to the patriarchs, the Chosen People, called to prepare for that day when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church. They would be the root onto which the Gentiles would be grafted, once they came to believe." (60) The English text here is not clear since it is not certain what is the referent of "They;" is it once the Jews or the Gentiles that would come to believe? A glance at the Italian and the French text makes it clear that it is the Gentiles that the pronoun "They" refers to. ("*Questo popolo sara la radice su cui verranno innestati I pagani diventati credenti*" is the Italian text.)

Section 63 explicitly states that "Israel is the priestly people of God; called by the name of the Lord' and 'The first to hear the word of God', The people of 'elder brethren' in the faith of Abraham."

It is clear from the above that the language of the Catechism is not "rejectionist" in the sense that Jules Isaac wrote in his important book,

Jesus and Israel, wherein he speaks of a tradition “which emptied the Gospels as it were of their historic substance and substituted the myth of rejection, of reprobation, of deicide.”^[4]

Since Vatican II there is a different approach, seeking to find the good in all other religions, affirming that salvation is possible to them, and finally that there is a special relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. Therefore, I believe it is essential to make a distinction between statements that embody the language of fulfillment and statements that embody the language of supersessionism in the sense that is offensive, where in non-Catholic views are vilified and treated with contempt.

If one has the full truth and all other opinions are intrinsically in error, then dialogue is useless. Dialogue presupposes difference of opinion; it is not necessary to reach agreement in order to have dialogue. Indeed, the whole point of dialogue is to understand and to be able to enrich one another with the viewpoints of the other. Does this mean that one must give up one's beliefs? On the contrary, it means that there must be a variety of faith positions. It is an erroneous view of dialogue which stresses agreement. Dialogue must stress understanding.

One must recognize that Judaism has its own fulfillment theology as indeed all universal religions must insofar as they anticipate a historic consummation. It is the fulfillment of those prophetic statements that look toward the establishment of a society of justice and peace in the Messianic age. It will be a time in the words of the prophet Isaiah that “the knowledge of God will be as the waters cover the sea” (11:9); when the teaching will come forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem and when “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more” (2:2-4).

In anticipating and working for this realization or historical fulfillment, Judaism is not supersessionist in the sense that it condemns or vilifies or rejects alternative viewpoints. On the contrary, it affirms today, as it has for centuries, that “the righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come,” and, therefore, in keeping with the way the Church understands her relationship with Judaism may be said to prefigure this new level of truth within the Church.

Perhaps a way to see this is by looking at philosophical discussion. One may be a Platonist or an Aristotelian, or a Hegelian, and firmly believe that the philosophical position embodies the truth. One can also argue for and defend these positions against the others. One would do this respectfully, yet strenuously. The Aristotelian may firmly believe that it fulfills all that is essential in and rejects all that is false in Platonism, and the Hegelian may feel that he incorporates all that is vital and living in the other two philosophies. The Platonist on his part in no way believes that he has a deficient or incomplete philosophy. In fact, he may believe that many philosophical issues

are simply not possible of resolution. But this in no way detracts from the Platonist's belief that this is as much truth as one can actually affirm and that all attempts to go beyond that is in the way of a likely story and as such beyond definite proof. Obviously this is an analogy but the point is clear that the Platonist does not feel uncomfortable that the Aristotelian and the Hegelian feel that his philosophy is incomplete as long as the Aristotelian and the Hegelian treat his position with respect, care and fairness, which means that he can recognize himself in the representation of the other. Of course, this is not easy to do, even with non-emotionally laden beliefs — still it is a desideratum. Also there must be universal standards of agreement. Here the Philosopher is in a somewhat less difficult position than the Jew or Catholic. The Philosopher seeks agreement on the basis of reason and experience, not on any particular revelation. Fortunately, the Catholic Church fully accepts the position that reason is objective and compelling and universal, and not to be despised and, therefore, dialogue becomes much easier, although never easy.

Must one say that the Aristotelian or the Hegelian is supersessionist in the sense that both claim to go beyond the Platonist — a view that the Platonist will not grant? I do not think so. And I do not think that in an analogous sense the Catechism is supersessionist.

To make it clearer still, to Jews, it would be an understatement to say that this Catechism is “new.” It is not merely “new.” From Jewish perspective, it is revolutionary. A revolutionary assertion by the Church of brotherhood and love towards the Jewish people. Being taught upon its principles, no Catholic child could ever confront a Jewish child with contempt and condemnation, no Catholic community could ever make a Jewish family feel unwelcome — without violating the very innate bond between the Church and God's Covenant.

Indeed, a rupture of Jewish-Catholic relationship is a rupture of God's Own History.

Certainly there are difficult passages. Certainly there are differences of opinions. Certainly Jews will never completely accept the truth of the Catholic Catechism — indeed, how can they without relinquishing their Judaism? Nevertheless, every Jewish person needs to read this Catechism and think very deeply before criticizing it indiscriminately: What would the world have been like had it been written 2,000 years earlier?

The catechism makes the term “Christian anti-Semitism” outdated and oxymoronic. The catechism makes clear, what was affirmed explicitly during the Polish Bishop's Conference of 1991, that “anti-Semitism is anti-Christian.”

Rabbi Jack Bemporad

Notes

[1] This text is found in Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (ed.), *Pope John Paul II. Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism* 1979-1995 (New York: Crossroad, 1995) pp. 17-22.

[2] For these texts, see Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (ed.), *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990).

[3] Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964).

[4] Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 398 ff.

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