

CHRISTIANITY & JUDAISM/INTERRELIGIOUS STUDIES

Topic:	Perspectives on “A Note on Ambiguities Contained in ‘Reflections on Covenant and Mission’”
Administrative Team:	Elena Procario-Foley, Mary Boys, Angela Harkins
Convener & Moderator:	Elena Procario-Foley, Iona College
Panelists:	Paul Knitter, Union Theological Seminary Mary Rose D’Angelo, University of Notre Dame Mary Boys, Union Theological Seminary

“A Note on Ambiguities Contained in ‘Reflections on Covenant and Mission,’” issued jointly by the USCCB Committees on Doctrine and Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs on June 18, 2009, provided the foundation for this year’s discussion. The administrative team invited a panel of scholars to address the various issues raised by the “Note” in light of a series of related developments including the change to the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults concerning the validity of God’s covenant with the Jewish people (see USCCA pages 130-1).

Mary Boys set the context for the session guiding participants through key sections of RCM, “Note,” and related texts. Boys identified four core issues: “conflicting notions of the religious other,” “assumptions about the nature and consequences of Catholic-Jewish dialogue,” “sources and methods of doing theology,” and “tensions between bishops and theologians.” These issues resurfaced in the other presentations as well as in the robust discussion among all participants in the Consultation. Boys’ presentation highlighted contrasting portions of various documents demonstrating that the Church’s statements on the religious other are at best confusing. Boys asked if there is something to be learned in the dialogical process; she suggests that the documents from the USCCB do not account adequately for the deep impact of history or indicate an awareness of Jewish life and what hurts Jews. Further, USCCB documents appear to engage only “settled teaching” and work within a promise-fulfillment framework; theologians in the dialogue, however, more readily confront the results of recent biblical scholarship and the shameful history of the “teaching of contempt.” Boys’ concluding reflection addressed the difficult situation that the distance between bishops and theologians creates for our Jewish dialogue partners.

In an effort to sharpen our thinking about the biblical use of such terms as “covenant,” “mission,” and “fulfillment” in contemporary systematic and doctrinal texts, the Consultation invited Mary Rose D’Angelo to consider the use of scripture in the “Note.” D’Angelo began by noting the many different factors that led to the great diversification of biblical studies in the 1970s. She argued that historical and cultural contexts need to be applied concretely in biblical studies and that these contexts are missing from the bishops’ “Note” which reasserts, out of context, a very problematic statement in *Dei Verbum*. Consequently, D’Angelo determines that the “Note” does not so much “modify” the acknowledgment that God’s covenant with the Jews endures as cancel this acknowledgment. In her view, while covenant is a governing metaphor of the Hebrew Bible

it is not central, though it is important, to the New Testament. D'Angelo states that other New Testament metaphors derived from the Hebrew Bible such as the reign of God, participation in Christ, the Holy Spirit, and prophecy are far more important than covenant. She notes the limited number of direct references to covenant in the New Testament and explains that they are metaphoric on a second level as they all operate as interpretations of earlier texts. After her exegesis of several of the covenant texts, D'Angelo concludes that when covenantal language appears in the New Testament it is arguing for the inclusion of the gentiles not the abrogation of the Covenant with the Jewish people. By contrast, in the course of history, covenant has functioned for Catholics in only supersessionist not devotional ways. D'Angelo concluded with a suggestion, in terms learned from Maryknoll, for "reverse mission," to listen to and absorb messages from the colonized and the religious other before making conversion of the religious other a goal.

Paul Knitter expanded the discussion of the "Note" to consider its implications for the general Catholic theology of religions. Knitter agreed with his panel colleagues that the "Note" did not clarify but contradicted "RCM." Yet, for Knitter, creative responses will develop from the tensions outlined by both Boys and D'Angelo. The core contradiction has to do with supersessionism. Knitter contends that "RCM" seeks to supersede supersessionism while the "Note" reaffirms it implicitly but clearly. Knitter finds the contradiction within the magisterium itself and suggests that it is a contradiction between the enduring covenant and non-supersessionist viewpoint of John Paul II, Cardinal Kasper, *Nostra Aetate*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the supersessionist viewpoint of Cardinal Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, Cardinal Dulles, and the revisions of the American Catechism. The key problem the contradiction presents is a clash between ethics and doctrine. Catholics cannot have an ethics of dialogue together with a theology of supersessionism. Knitter issued a plea for genuine open theological discussion to help each other find ways of bringing together an affirmation of the abiding validity of Israel and the salvific significance of Christ.

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