

## JUDAISM &amp; POSTCONCILIAR CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Topic: The Mystery of Eschatological Fulfillment: Post-Conciliar Catholic Identity Reflecting Prophetic Commitment to and with the Jewish People in Covenant with God

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The Interest Group's focus is the renewal of Catholic identity and theology based upon the transformation of Catholic approaches to Judaism post-Vatican II. The trajectory of Catholic eschatological thought in regard to Judaism and the Jewish people, as evident in ecclesiastical documents of Vatican II and post-Vatican II was addressed in the Group's third and final program.

In 1964, the question of whether the envisioned declaration "On the Jews" should express hopes for their collective turn to Jesus Christ led the Council to consider Judaism's relationship to God in an eschatological context. During the so-called "Great Debate" of September 1964, several bishops and cardinals urged that the declaration not encourage Catholics to try to convert Jews since the destiny of the Jewish people depends on the ways of Divine Providence and the grace of God. The fullness of God's will for the Jewish people, said Cardinal Giacomo Lercaro of Bologna will be revealed "in ways that are religious and mysterious, whose mysteriousness we must respect. Those ways are hidden in the wisdom and knowledge of God. . . . Only an eschatological turn of events will bring [Jews and Christians] to the common messianic meal of the eternal Pasch."

Later, the *Nostra Aetate* draft was revised to reflect this futurist eschatology: ". . . the Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all people will call upon the Lord with a single voice and 'serve him with one accord' (Zeph 3:9)." As the official record of the Council explained, "The paragraph concerning the church's eschatological hope is changed. Many fathers asked that in the expression of this hope, since it concerns the mystery [of Israel], any appearance of proselytism be avoided." Since these topics were a matter of public debate, it is clear that when in October 1965 they voted overwhelmingly by 1937 to 153 votes to approve this phrasing, the Council fathers were fully aware of its meaning. This conciliar decision helps to explain the reason, as Cardinal Walter Kasper has noted, "that there is no organized Catholic missionary activity towards Jews."

It is evident in the post-conciliar documents of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that a futurist eschatology characterizes the emerging new Catholic perspective on Jews and Judaism. This futurist eschatology relates to a more nuanced understanding of the way in which Christ and the Church "fulfill" covenantal promises made by God to Israel in the Christian "Old Testament." The CRRJ's 1974 "Guidelines" to implement *Nostra Aetate*, 4 state that: "We believe that those promises ["of the earlier Covenant"] were fulfilled with the first coming of Christ. But it is none the less true that we still await their perfect fulfillment in his glorious return at the end of time." Its 1985 "Notes" on how to preach and teach correctly about Judaism stresses and develops this point.

The PBC's 2001 study of the Jewish scriptures in the Christian Bible considers the Mystery of eschatological convergence: "What has already been accomplished in Christ must yet be accomplished in us and in the world. The definitive fulfillment will be at the end. . . . Jewish messianic expectation is not in vain. It can become for us Christians a powerful stimulus to keep alive the eschatological dimension of our faith. Like them, we too live in expectation. The difference is that for us the One who is to come will have the traits of the Jesus who has already come and is already present and active among us." This vision of the eschaton imagines Jews and Christians both recognizing the eschatological messiah on the basis of distinct but converging "traits" mediated by their respective traditions. This is a "non-zero sum" approach that does not require one tradition to be proven fundamentally wrong at the eschaton.

Recent tensions in Catholic-Jewish relations include the somewhat ambiguous 2008 Tridentine Rite Good Friday intercession for Jews, which does not affirm Jewish covenantal life as does the standard 1970 version and prays that Jews "will recognize Jesus Christ as the savior of all humanity." In an April 2008 article in *L'Osservatore Romano*, published at the request of Pope Benedict, Cardinal Walter Kasper insists that the prayer be understood as expressing an eschatological hope: "So in this prayer the Church does not take it upon herself to orchestrate the realization of the unfathomable mystery. She cannot do so. Instead, she lays the when and the how entirely in God's hands. God alone can bring about the Kingdom of God in which the whole of Israel is saved and eschatological peace is bestowed on the world."

Documents released in 2009 under the auspices of the USCCB include a striking preference for a realized eschatology: "Catholics believe that all previous covenants that God made with the Jewish people are fulfilled in Jesus Christ through the new covenant established through his sacrificial death on the cross;" "Jesus Christ is the unique savior of all humankind, who fulfills in himself all of God's promises and covenants with the people of Israel;" and "Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God fulfills both in history and at the end of time the special relationship that God established with Israel. . . . The long story of God's intervention in the history of Israel comes to its unsurpassable culmination in Jesus Christ, who is God become man" [emphases added]. Even though the third quotation mentions "the end of time," the repeated use of the present tense makes it clear that the futurist eschatological orientation of conciliar and post-conciliar ecclesiastical documents is disregarded.

A stress on a realized eschatology may indicate a "neo-supersessionist" perspective at work. A futurist eschatology in regard to Catholic theological perspectives on Judaism and the Jewish people, however, leads to a "theology of shalom" by which both Jews and Christians are covenanted people called to collaborate throughout historic time in their common prophetic witness to the coming Reign of God.

Thank you, Phil, for providing us with an excellent presentation, which generated enthusiastic and engaging discussion!

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