

## *American Catholic Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the foreword to an Italian book in which Jews and Christians commented on passages from scripture, Pope Francis wrote, "I am well aware that we have behind us nineteen centuries of Christian anti-Judaism and that a few decades of dialogue are very small in comparison. However, in recent times many things have changed and still others are changing."<sup>1</sup> While it is widely known that the Catholic Church has sought to improve relations with Jews, there have not been major studies that statistically chart changes in Catholic attitudes or teaching. This article presents the findings of an unprecedented survey of American Catholic perspectives on Jews, with a particular interest in its implications for Catholic religious education.

Catholic ideas about Jews and Judaism were, for over a millennium, hostile. They were predicated on the conviction dating from the second century that God had cursed Jews to homeless wandering because they had rejected and continued to reject Jesus Christ. Among other things, this long history explains why the Zionist proposal for Jews to return to their ancient homeland was met with total rejection by Pope Pius X in 1906: "The Jewish religion was the foundation of our own; but it was superseded by the teachings of Christ, and we cannot concede it any further validity. ... [I]f you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize all of you."<sup>2</sup>

Such premises were not officially renounced by the Catholic Church until after the Shoah (Holocaust) when the Second Vatican Council in its 1965 declaration *Nostra Aetate* instructed that "Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures."<sup>3</sup> This major shift was followed by additional ecclesiastical statements in the

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<sup>1</sup> Marco Cassuto Morselli and Giulio Michelini, eds., *La Bibbia dell'Amicizia: Brani della Torah/Pentateuco commentati da ebrei e cristiani* (Milano: San Paolo, 2019), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York/London: Herzl Press, Thomas Yoseloff, 1960), 1601-1605.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (1965), 4: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-)

succeeding decades that continued the trajectory begun in *Nostra Aetate* and deepened Catholic theology on Jews and Judaism. The nationally-representative survey that we conducted between June 9-17, 2022 provides insights into how well this dramatic change in official Catholic teachings since 1965 is reflected among American Catholics today by assessing their views about their Jewish neighbors, Christian-Jewish relations, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This survey includes 1,241 US Catholic adults and was fielded online by SurveyUSA using the sample provided by Lucid Holdings, LLC of New Orleans. The pool of adult survey respondents was weighted to Pew Research Center targets<sup>4</sup> for gender, age, race, education, and household income, and to regional targets from *Commonweal Magazine*, as reported via Wikipedia.<sup>5</sup> The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed  $\pm 3.2\%$ . Margins of error are higher in some sub-groups.

Throughout this article, we will compare aspects of the present survey of American Catholics to similar research on the attitudes of evangelical and born-again Christian Americans conducted in 2021 by two of us, Kirill Bumin and Motti Inbari.<sup>6</sup> Such comparisons will be made for several reasons. First, Catholics and evangelical Protestants have different theological beliefs and practices. Comparing their opinions can help us to understand the nuances and differences between these two largest American Christian communities. Second, due to their size, Catholic and evangelical Protestants both have significant social and political influence. Comparing their opinions on religious views can help us to understand how these groups shape public opinion and policy decisions. Third, despite theological differences, Catholics and evangelical Christians share many religious values and beliefs. Comparing their perspectives can help to identify areas of common ground and promote interfaith dialogue and collaboration, thus fostering tolerance and understanding between these groups and perhaps openness to diverse religious beliefs.<sup>7</sup>

This article is organized into several parts. After presenting some demographic data of our research sample, we will discuss religious questions regarding Jews and Judaism. This is followed by questions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It ends with a discussion about respondents' answers in the light of official Catholic teaching. Importantly, these divisions are not strict; some questions are discussed at multiple points.

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[aetate\\_en.html](#). There are many scholarly discussions of *Nostra Aetate*; recent studies include John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews 1933-1965* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) 239-72; and Philip A. Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom: The Journey to Right Relationship between Catholics and Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 141-53.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/catholic/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic\\_Church\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States#cite\\_ref-13](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_in_the_United_States#cite_ref-13)

<sup>6</sup> Kirill Bumin and Motti Inbari. "In the Shadow of 2021 Gaza Conflict: Evangelical and Born-Again Christian Views of the Israeli-Palestinian Dispute." An initial report on the July 2021 survey with evangelical and born-again Christians. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/357062740>. This survey was fielded July 8-22, 2021 by the Barna Group and consisted of 1,012 self-identified evangelical and born-again Christians. A demographically balanced online panel was used. Maximum quotas and slight weights were used for gender, region, age, ethnicity, and education to reflect the U.S. evangelical Christian population more accurately, as defined by Pew Religious Landscape Survey. The sample offers 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed  $\pm 2.9\%$ .

<sup>7</sup> For earlier studies of both Catholics and evangelicals (and others) on some of the topics we address, see the Pew study discussed by Becka A. Alper, "Modest Warming in U.S. Views on Israel and Palestinians" (May 26, 2022) (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/05/26/modest-warming-in-u-s-views-on-israel-and-palestinians>) and the Gallup study discussed by Frank Newport, "Americans' Religion and Their Sympathies in the Middle East" (May 28, 2021) (<https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/350435/americans-religion-sympathies-middle-east.aspx>). These surveys were less targeted to members of these religious groups and much shorter, asking only a few questions.

## 2. DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

In the survey, the majority of Catholics are white (57.9% of the sample), followed by Hispanics and Latinos (33.4%). 45.6% of Catholics have a college degree, while those who have a high school, some college, or vocational training comprise 52.5% of the sample. Their mean household income is roughly \$67,500. 55.7% of the respondents in our survey are female. The mean age of our respondents is 50.7 years of age, and 50.9% of the respondents are married. These demographic statistics about age, income, and gender largely mirror national estimates for American Catholics provided by the Pew Research Center,<sup>8</sup> Gallup,<sup>9</sup> the Public Religion Research Institute,<sup>10</sup> and the US Religion Census.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of the regional distribution of the respondents, 24.1% hailed from the Northeast of the United States, 17.3% from the Midwest, 34.3% from the South, and 24.3% from the West. 35.5% of the Catholics surveyed live in urban areas, 46.5% in suburban neighborhoods, and 18.5% in rural environments. These results comport with other research on the US Catholic population.<sup>12</sup>

In responses about their degree of religious practice, 51.6% of the Catholics polled said they do not attend Church much: 13.5% never, 19.2% seldom, and 18.9% a few times per year. 43.9% said they come to church often: 9.6% visit 2 or 3 times a month, 30.9% every week, and 3.4% every day. These numbers are consistent with other indicators of Catholic church attendance.<sup>13</sup>

Politically, most Catholics identify themselves as moderates or "middle of the road" (38.6%), but more self-identify as conservative (33.5%) (on a range from slightly conservative to extremely conservative) than liberal (28%) (slightly liberal and extremely liberal). When it comes to party affiliation, 40.8% said they are Democrats, and 10.7% said they are independents leaning Democrat. 31.1% identify as Republicans, and 11.1% identified as independents leaning Republicans.<sup>14</sup> In the 2020 presidential election vote, 37.2% said they voted for Trump, 43.4% said they voted for Biden, 2.4% said they voted for another candidate, 13.4% said they have not voted, and 3.6% preferred not to answer. From this data, we can observe that American Catholics are not politically homogenous. They have strong liberal and conservative wings, while there is a slight tilt toward liberal opinions in the American political landscape.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/chapter-3-demographic-profiles-of-religious-groups/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/350435/americans-religion-sympathies-middle-east.aspx>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.prrri.org/spotlight/the-u-s-catholic-experience/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/interactive-tables>

<sup>12</sup> Pew Research Center, "[A Closer Look at Catholic America](#)," September 14, 2015; PRRI, "[The US Catholic Experience](#)," February 7, 2020; Catholic News Agency, "[U.S. Catholic population shows growth, trends southward](#)," May 12, 2023.

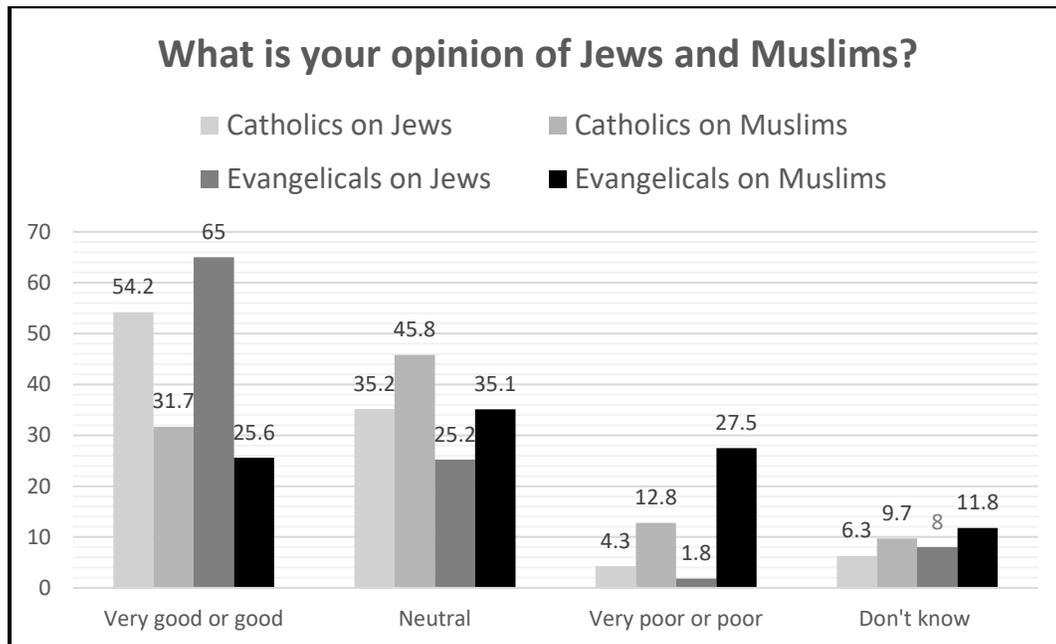
<sup>13</sup> Lyida Saad (Gallup), "[Catholics' Church Attendance Resumes Downward Slide](#)," April 9, 2018. In this study 39% reported attending church weekly between 2014-2017.

<sup>14</sup> These party identification data are relatively consistent with data from Pew Research Center, described in the "[Party Affiliation among Catholics](#)" portion of the Religious Landscape Study, carried out in 2014.

### 3. AMERICAN CATHOLIC RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF JEWS AND JUDAISM

#### A. American Catholic Opinions about Jews and Muslims

When asked for their overall opinion of Jews, 54.2% of the Catholics surveyed had good or very good views, with 41.5% responding either “neutral” or “I don’t know,” while 4.3% indicated poor or very poor opinions. In response to the same question about Muslims, the responses were more uncertain and less positive. Only 31.7% had good or very good opinions, while 55.5% did not know or were neutral, and 12.8% had poor or very poor views. These Catholic Christian responses can be compared with those of evangelical Christians.<sup>15</sup> For both American Christian groups, attitudes toward Jews were more positive than those toward Muslims, though Catholics to a lesser degree than evangelicals (54.3% vs. 65%). About twice as many evangelicals had poor or very poor feelings toward Muslims than Catholics, who tended to be more neutral toward both Jews and Muslims than evangelicals. The surveys cited here did not explore the reasons for these results.<sup>16</sup>

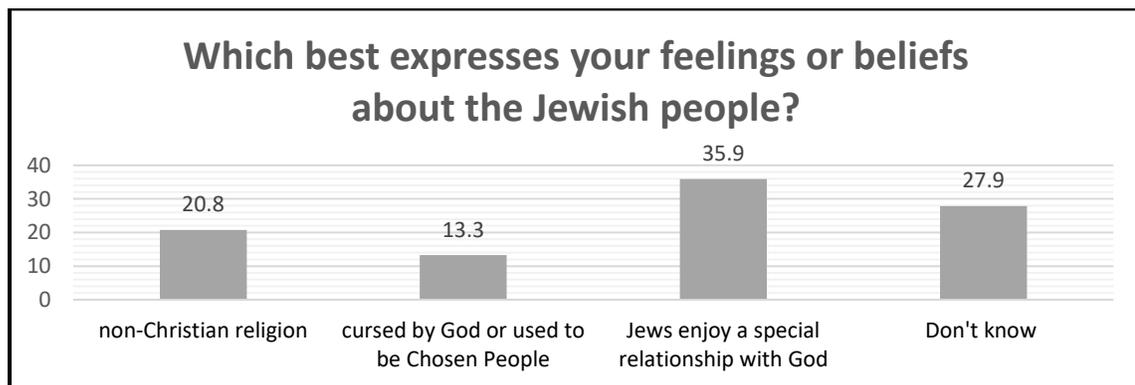


<sup>15</sup> Motti Inbari, Kirill M. Bumin, and Michel G. Byrd, “Why Do Evangelicals Support Israel?” *Politics and Religion*, 14/1 (2021): 28.

<sup>16</sup> We note, though, that the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent global “War on Terror” had a major impact on American attitudes towards Jews and Muslims in many ways. After 9/11, there was a sharp increase in discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. who were often subject to racial profiling and increased scrutiny by law enforcement and government agencies. Many faced harassment and even violence. The War on Terror also led to heightened negative perceptions of Islam, with many Americans associating the religion with terrorism and violence. There is a large body of literature on these factors, including these books: Khaled A. Beydoun, *American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Adam Garfinkle, *Jewcentricity: Why the Jews Are Praised, Blamed, and Used to Explain Just About Everything* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2009); Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* (London: Pluto Press, 2012); and Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiment: Picturing the Enemy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

In terms of Catholic attitudes, the present survey seems to substantiate the view that personal contact between members of different groups improves views of each other.<sup>17</sup> This seems to be the case with Catholics and Jews as well. Few of the Catholics surveyed had attended a Jewish religious service in a synagogue (20.8%), but more than two-thirds of the respondents indicated they had socialized with Jewish friends and neighbors and 56% had Jewish co-workers. This indicates that interactions among American Catholics and Jews mostly do not occur in religious settings but in society at large and in the workplace. Our survey has confirmed this hypothesis about contact and shows that several different types of social interaction have a strong correlation with positive opinions of Jews. Specifically, if Catholics encounter Jews at work, socially as friends, and also at Jewish religious services, on average their views of Jews increase in positivity by about 70% for each type of engagement. This can be put in directly comparative terms: Catholics with the highest level of exposure to and socialization with Jews are 2.8 times more likely to express a positive opinion of Jews than respondents who had no Jewish friends or exposure to Jewish practice.

While American Catholics generally had favorable or neutral sentiments toward Jews, the survey further assessed Catholic attitudes toward Jews and Judaism by inquiring about specifically theological topics. Thus, respondents were asked, “Which best expresses your feelings or beliefs about the Jewish people?” and given explicitly theological answer choices. One-fifth (20.8%) gave the matter-of-fact reply that Judaism is a non-Christian religion, an answer that seems to indicate neither a positive nor negative assessment of the religious status of Jews. 13.3% stated that Jews were either cursed by God or used to be the Chosen People, an answer that can be read as a negative assessment of Jews on theological grounds.<sup>18</sup> Finally, 27.9% of the participants answered, “I don’t know.” The largest response was given by the 35.9% of those surveyed who selected the statement “Jews enjoy a special and ongoing relationship with God.”



Directly related to this question is the topic of chosenness. Chosenness (or election), while defined variously, has long been a prominent feature of Jewish religious self-identity, although it has also occasioned controversy and opposition.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., “Positive and Extensive Intergroup Contact in the Past Buffers against the Disproportionate Impact of Negative Contact in the Present,” Stefania Paolini, Jake Harwood, Mark Rubin, Shenel Husnu, Nicholas Joyce, and Miles Hewstone, *European Journal of Social Psychology Research* 44/6 (2014): 548-562.

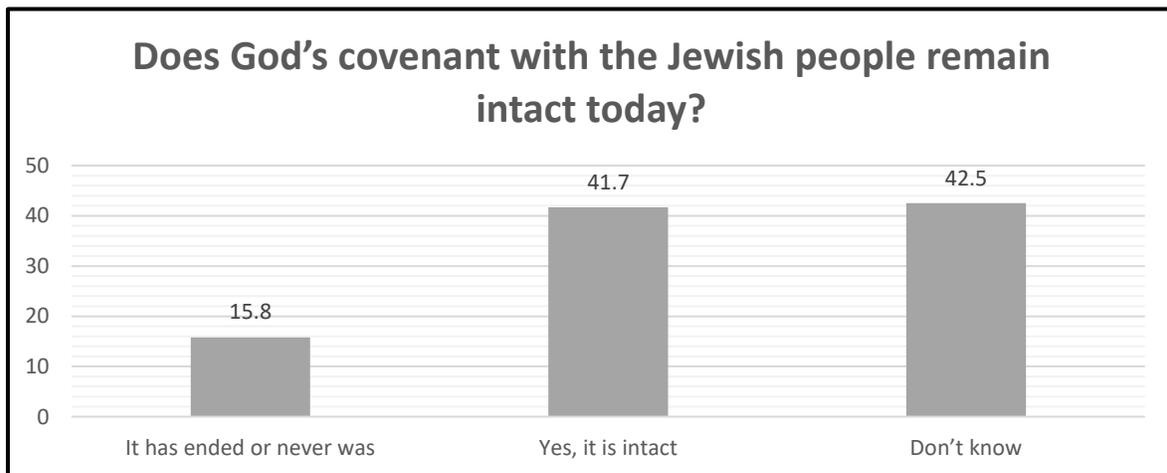
<sup>18</sup> The survey options for beliefs about Jews as “cursed by God” or “used to be the Chosen People,” reflect R. Kendall Soulen’s distinction between “punitive” and “economic” supersessionism. See his *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 28-31.

Two variables correlate statistically with the negative opinions that Jews were never chosen or had lost that status to Christians. The first is unremarkable: those who think the Jewish covenant with God has ended or that Jews never had a covenant are consistent in expressing this negative assessment in the related category of chosenness. This makes sense on logical grounds.

However, the second correlation is not so easily explained. Belief that the Bible should be read literally (i.e., an agreement with the statement “[The Bible] is the word of God and should be taken literally” [see below]) is strongly correlated with respondents’ *rejection* of the idea of Jews’ chosenness. The reason for this correlation is not immediately clear. One possibility is that these Catholics understood “the Bible” to refer primarily to the New Testament, which, in contrast to the multiple affirmations of the chosenness of the Israelites/Jews found in the Old Testament, says little about it. More on chosenness appears below.

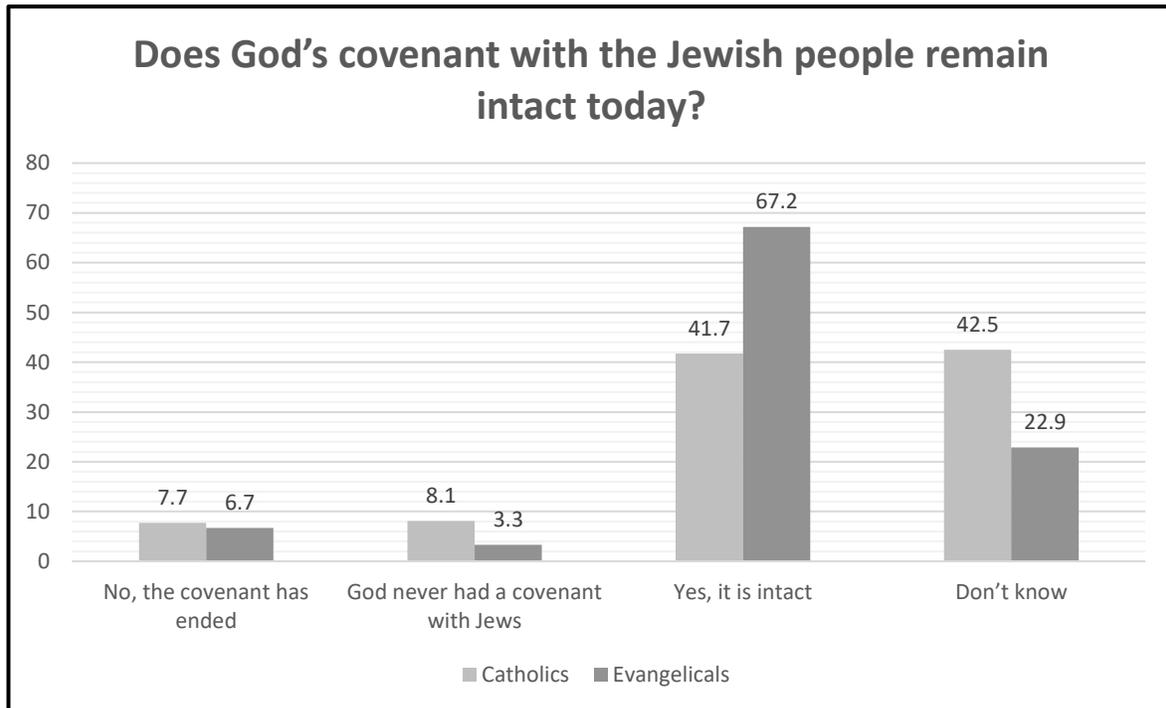
### ***B. American Catholics and Whether Jews Are in Covenant with God***

Later in the survey, participants were asked a similar theological question that explicitly used the term “covenant”: Does God’s covenant with the Jewish people remain intact today? 41.7% affirmed that it is intact, 15.8% answered that this covenant had ended or never existed, and 42.5% replied that they did not know. The responses to both questions (spiritual status of Jews and Jewish covenant) are roughly consistent. When the option in the former question that “Judaism is a non-Christian religion” was removed, a higher percentage of respondents (42.5% vs. 27.9%) did not know how to answer the question about Jewish covenanting with God. Thus, roughly an equal number of Catholics felt that Jews are in covenant with God as those who did not know about the status of the Jewish covenant.



There are striking differences in Catholic replies to the covenant inquiry in comparison with evangelical Christian responses to the exact same question. Less than half of the Catholics (41.7%) felt that Jewish covenantal life with God was intact, while over two-thirds of evangelicals (67.2%) held that view.

Similarly, almost twice as many Catholics (42.5%) were unsure how to answer the question when compared with evangelicals (22.9%). What explains these differences between Catholics and evangelicals on the subject of Jewish covenanting with God? We suspect that their diverse views on the Christian Bible plays a role. Again, more discussion on this topic is below.



How do the survey results of Catholics’ views on the covenantal life of Jews compare with Catholic Church teaching? Numerous Vatican texts and post-Vatican II popes have declared that Jews abide in ongoing covenant with God. For example, Pope Francis wrote in 2014 that “We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for ‘the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29).”<sup>19</sup> In both the pertinent survey questions, less than half of the survey participants (respectively 35.9% and 41.7%) held that view.

During his twenty-six-year pontificate (October 1978-April 2005), Pope John Paul II prioritized the implementation of the Second Vatican Council’s call for a new relationship between Catholics and Jews. A very significant element of his teaching, first stated in 1980, was that Jews are “the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God” and “the present-day people

<sup>19</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2014), §247.  
[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

of the Covenant concluded with Moses.”<sup>20</sup> He reiterated this theme many times subsequently,<sup>21</sup> and his basic insight was affirmed by his successors, Popes Benedict XVI<sup>22</sup> and Francis.<sup>23</sup>

The Catholics we surveyed seem largely unaware of these developments. The same percentage did not know whether God’s covenant with the Jewish people remains in effect today as said it did (~ 42%). 16% replied that such a covenant had ceased or had never existed at all, meaning that more than half of the respondents (58.3%) could not affirm that God’s covenant with Jews “remains intact.” These results suggest that Catholic liturgy and education need to express the key teaching on Jewish covenantal life more vigorously if Catholics are to acquire “an exact knowledge of the wholly unique ‘bond’ (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 4) which joins [the] Church to the Jews and to Judaism.”<sup>24</sup> This is a “pastoral concern for a still living reality closely related to the Church ... ‘The people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked.’”<sup>25</sup>

### C. Catholics and the Crucifixion

On the historically vexatious question of who bears responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus,<sup>26</sup> nearly 70% of the respondents chose either a historical answer (28.2% selected “Roman soldiers / Pontius Pilate”) or a theological one (41.6% chose “the sins of humanity”). These replies are in accord with official Catholic teaching, which made it clear in *Nostra Aetate* that “what happened in [Jesus’] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. ... [T]he Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>27</sup> Of the remaining responses, 11% blamed “the Jews” and 19.2% either did not know or blamed no one (9.6% each). In terms of Catholic doctrine

<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Address to Representatives of the West German Jewish Community,” Mainz, West Germany, November 17, 1980, §3. <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-80nov17>

<sup>21</sup> See his addresses to the Australian Jewish Community, Nov 26, 1986; American Jewish Leaders, Sept 11, 1987; the Viennese Jewish Community, June 24, 1988; the New Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See. Nov. 8, 1990; his General Audience, April 28, 1999; his Jasna Gora Meditation, Sept 26, 1990; his Letter concerning Pilgrimage to Places Linked to the History of Salvation, June 29, 1999; and his Homily at Mount Sinai, Feb 26, 2000 at <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii>. The relevant quotations from the texts are provided in Philip A. Cunningham, “Official Ecclesial Documents to Implement Vatican II on Relations with Jews: Study Them, Become Immersed in Them, and Put Them into Practice,” *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009): 21-25: <https://ejournals.bc.edu/index.php/scjr/article/view/1521/1374>

<sup>22</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address at the Great Synagogue of Rome,” January 17, 2010, §3: [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20100117\\_sinagoga.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100117_sinagoga.html). As emeritus pope, he sought to “clarify and deepen” the concept in “Grace and Vocation without Remorse: Comments on the Treatise *De Judaeis*,” *Communio* 45 (Spring 2018): 181. [https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1\\_Benedict\\_XVI.pdf](https://www.communio-icr.com/files/45.1_Benedict_XVI.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2014), §247.

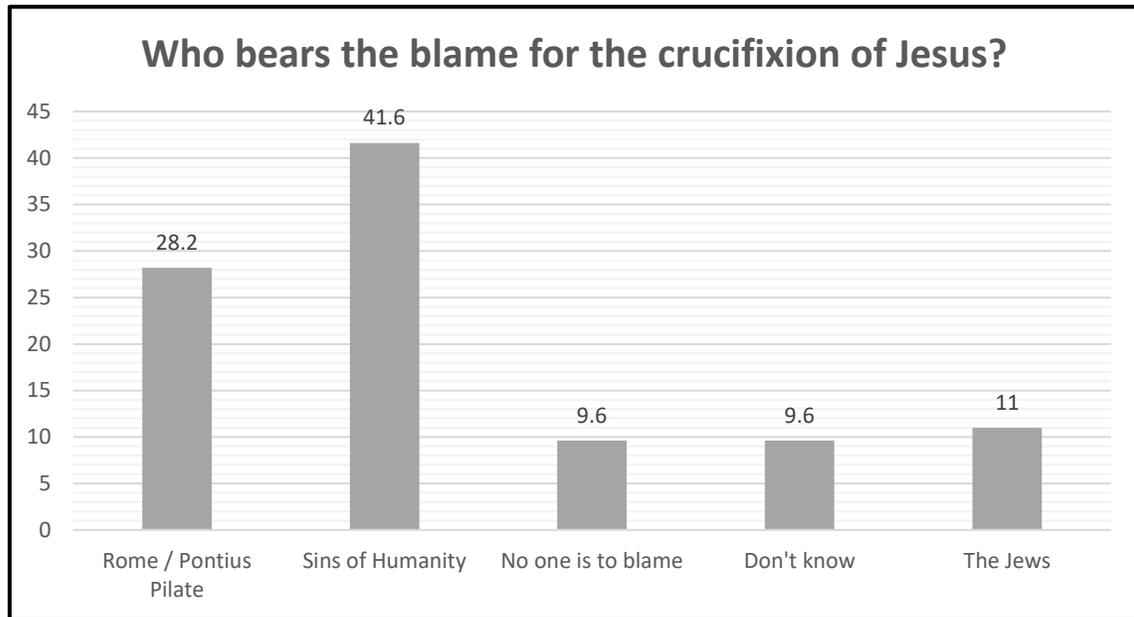
<sup>24</sup> CRRJ, “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church, June 24, 1985, §I,8: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en2.html>

<sup>25</sup> CRRJ, “Notes,” §I,3., citing Pope John Paul II.

<sup>26</sup> For an overview of this topic, see Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

and the centuries-long “Christ-killer” charge leveled against Jews, the relatively few responses that blamed Jews for the execution of Jesus are a positive sign for Jewish-Catholic relations.



However, given the pernicious prevalence of the idea that God had cursed Jews to homeless wandering for rejecting Christ, which greatly contributed to antisemitism over the centuries, it is disturbing that almost 30% of the American Catholics surveyed thought either that “the Jews” bore the blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, that no one was to blame, or did not know what to think. Indeed, further statistical analyses of the data reveal that those who believe that “the Jews” crucified Jesus are six times more likely to hold that Christians have replaced Jews as God’s people. The fact that the Second Vatican Council authoritatively and explicitly rejected the historically inflammatory notion that Jews were “rejected or accursed by God”<sup>28</sup> could lead to the conclusion that a “passing grade” of 70% on this crucial issue is unacceptably low for Catholic religious education.

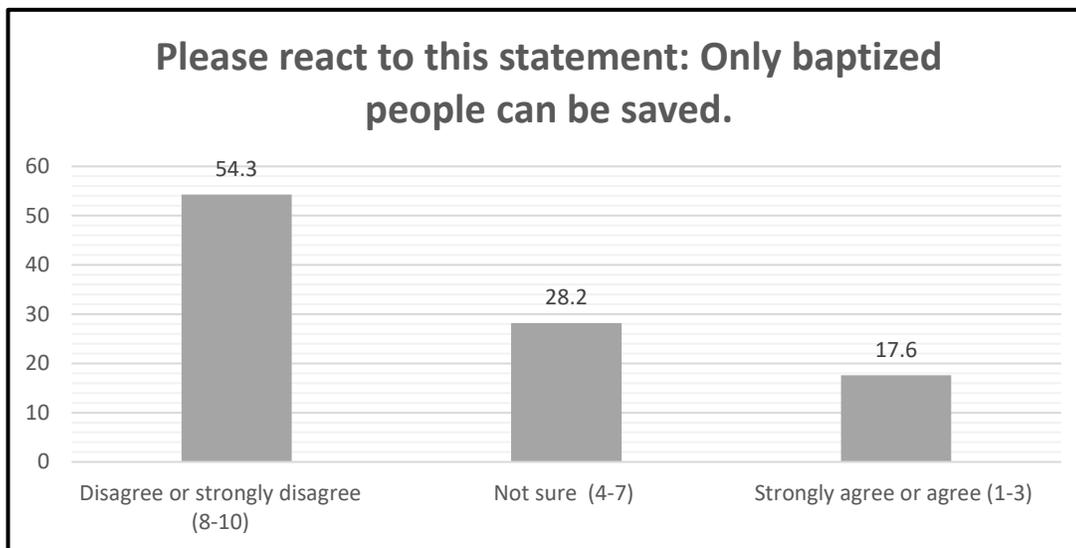
The two topics just discussed—Jewish covenantal life and responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus—are historically interrelated. When Jews were collectively deemed culpable for Jesus’ execution, most Christians believed that God was punishing them with powerlessness and vulnerability and had abrogated the original divine covenant with them.

#### ***D. Catholics and Salvation***

The notion of Jewish culpability for the crucifixion of Jesus also connects to the related topics of salvation and Christian missions to convert Jews. The survey asked questions about both. When asked if only baptized people can be saved, only 17.6% of the Catholics surveyed agreed or strongly agreed (8-10 on a 10-point scale), 28.2% were not sure, and 54.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed that salvation was restricted to baptized Christians. Thus, over 80% of the Catholics

<sup>28</sup> Second Vatican Council, “*Nostra Aetate*,” §4.

surveyed were not predisposed by their religious beliefs to look unfavorably upon Jews (or other non-Catholics / Christians) or their traditions as outside the community of salvation.



It is difficult to determine if these responses stem from familiarity with the highly nuanced doctrine of the Catholic Church on this topic. Catholic teaching asserts that “Jesus Christ is the mediator and the universal redeemer” but also that “the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity.”<sup>29</sup> On the latter point, the Catholic magisterium also holds that “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures, and religions. ... The Risen Christ is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> To put these and other ideas simply, the Catholic Church teaches that adherents of other religions or of none can be saved (be in right relationship with God) without explicit faith in Christ, but it is Christ who makes that possible.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that some respondents’ acceptance of the notion that non-Christians can be saved is consistent with official Catholic doctrine does not mean that they are aware of the subtleties of this teaching. What can be said is that (particularly female and older respondents) who expressed

<sup>29</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “*Dominus Iesus*: Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” (2000), II, 11,12:

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html)

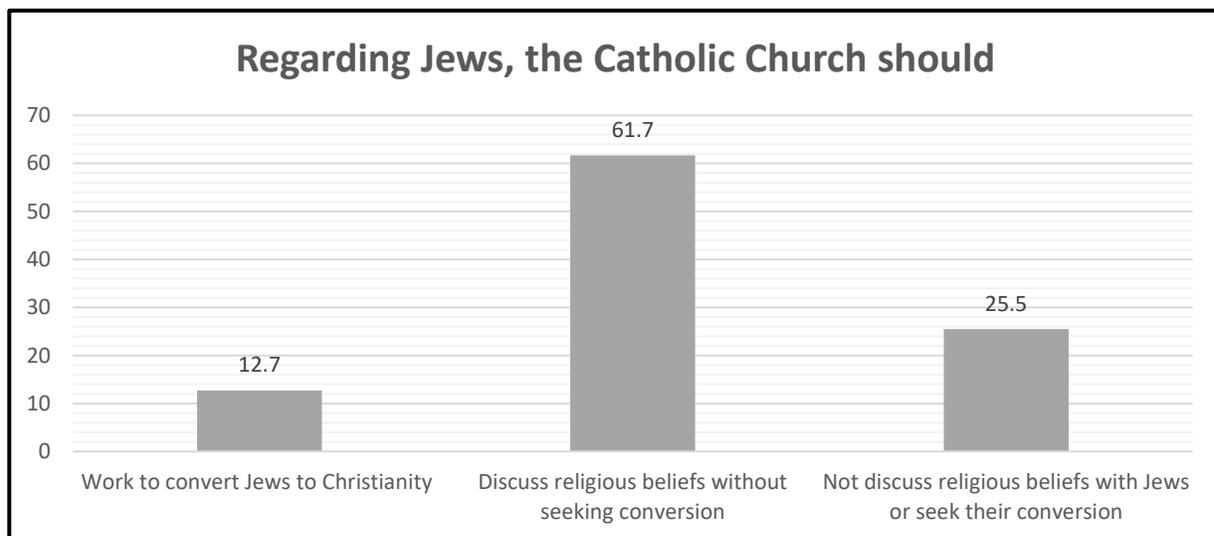
<sup>30</sup> CDF, *Dominus Iesus*, II, 12, citing Pope John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*: On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate” (1990), §28:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html). See also Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (1965), §22: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>31</sup> However, salvation outside of baptism is not considered to be “the ordinary means” of salvation. See Pope John Paul II, “*Redemptoris Missio*,” §55: “The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.” Note that his observation about all humanity does not address the special case of Jews. See also the discussion in Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom* 203-19.

positive feelings toward Jews were less likely to restrict salvation only to baptized Christians. Those who felt the Bible should be interpreted literally or who claimed to be familiar with Catholic teachings about Jews were more likely to adopt an exclusivist view of salvation.<sup>32</sup>

Relatedly, participants were also asked if they felt the Catholic Church should either seek to convert Jews or to dialogue with them about religious beliefs. Only 12.7% advocated efforts to convert Jews and 25.5% said that the Catholic Church should neither seek to convert Jews nor talk about their Jewish and Catholic beliefs. 61.7% answered that Jews and Catholics should discuss their respective beliefs without seeking to convert each other.



The Catholic Church's recognition that God's covenant with the children of Israel continues, as discussed above, has influenced the thinking of the Catholic Church about Judaism on such topics as evangelization and salvation. The 2015 Vatican document, "The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable," states that "the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews"<sup>33</sup> and "The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in right relationship with God. Whoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness."<sup>34</sup> The ideas that the Catholic Church does not actively proselytize Jews or that Jewish observance of the Torah has salvific value have their roots in changes begun with *Nostra Aetate*.

That declaration by the Second Vatican Council also sought "to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues."<sup>35</sup> The desire for interreligious dialogue with Jews has been reiterated in virtually every relevant Catholic ecclesiastical text ever since. Nearly two-thirds of

<sup>32</sup> These observations reflect additional logistic regression analyses conducted in preparation of this study, which are not fully reported here.

<sup>33</sup> Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews, "The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable' (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4)" (2015), §40: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo/commissione-per-i-rapporti-religiosi-con-l-ebraismo-crre/documenti-della-commissione/en.html>

<sup>34</sup> CRRJ, "Gifts and Calling," §24.

<sup>35</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, §4.

the responses to this question about conversion or dialogue are in line with this goal, but, again, Catholic educators and preachers might well consider the one-third of the responses that either oppose it (by wanting to convert Jews, 12.7%) or at least fail to endorse it (25.5%).

Those respondents who thought the Catholic Church should be trying to convert Jews (12.7%) were also more likely to think that the Bible should be read “literalistically,”<sup>36</sup> which is not Catholic teaching. Respondents were also more likely to favor the conversion of Jews if they felt they were familiar with Catholic teaching. However, women and older Catholics were less likely to support efforts to convert Jews.

Those who thought the Catholic Church should dialogue with Jews without seeking their conversion (61.7%) were more likely to have Jewish friends, to not believe that only Christians could be saved, and to hold that Jews have a special relationship with God.

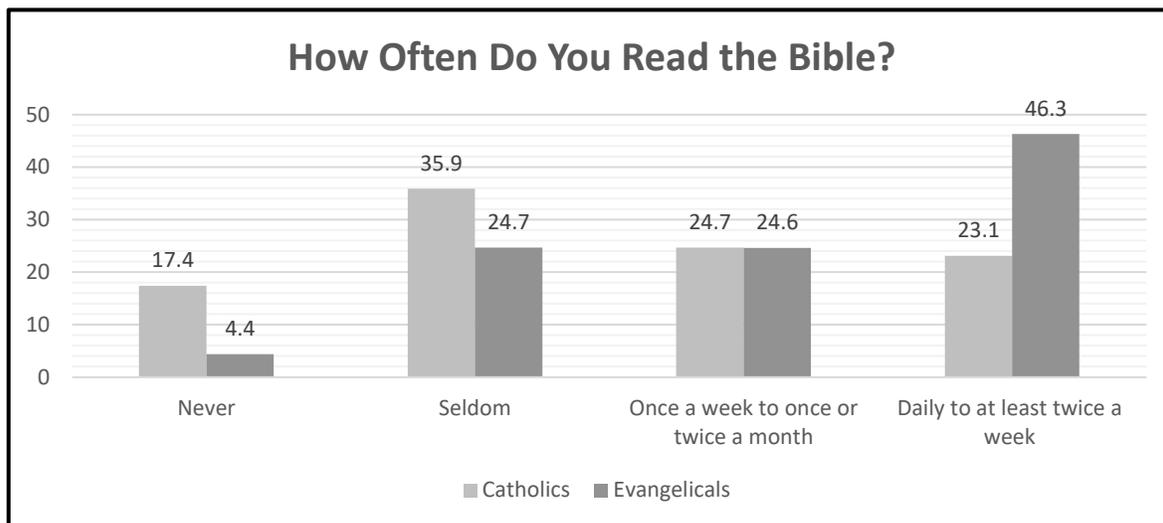
Finally, there is a statistically significant correlation between those who do not support either attempts at conversion of or interreligious dialogue with Jews (25.5% of participants) and those who reject biblical literalism. Additionally, those who have significant contact with Jews are less likely to prefer not to discuss religion with Jews or less likely to seek to convert Jews than those who have minimal or no exposure to Jews at all. Moreover, respondents who claimed familiarity with Catholic teaching were more likely to say either the Catholic Church should convert Jews or to discuss religion with Jews without hoping for their conversion. However, Catholic teaching actually encourages non-conversionary interreligious dialogue with Jews.

### ***E. Catholics and the Bible***

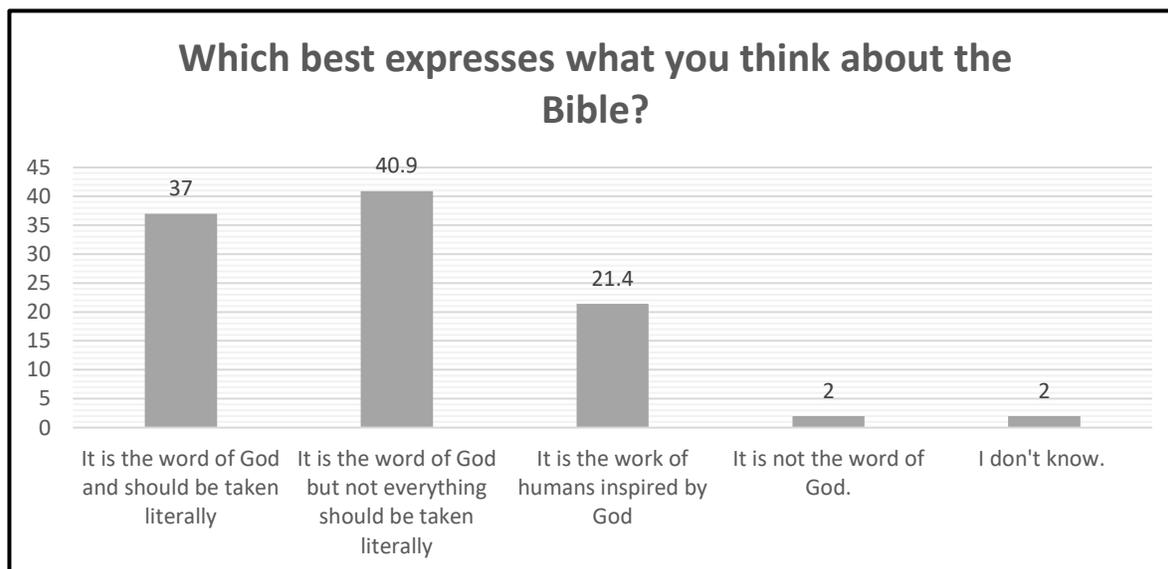
The Catholic survey posed questions to assess the influence of the Christian Bible on Catholic attitudes toward Jews. One question asked how often respondents read the Bible. More than half of the Catholics (53.1%) said they read the Bible seldom or never and less than a quarter (23.1%) read it twice a week or daily. In comparison with evangelical Christians, about one quarter of the respondents in both surveys say they read the Bible between once a week and once or twice a month (24.7 of Catholics; 24.6% of evangelicals). The greatest differences were between the most frequent and the most infrequent readers. (See chart below.) Nearly twice as many evangelicals as Catholics read the Bible frequently, and similarly twice as many Catholics as evangelicals reported they read the Bible seldom or never. This contrast is unsurprising; Bible study outside Church has traditionally been encouraged more by Protestant than by Catholic leaders (albeit there is more encouragement of Bible reading in today’s Catholic community in the wake of the acceptance of critical biblical scholarship by the Vatican beginning in 1943). The comparison between the percentage of respondents who chose “never” is particularly stark: 17.4% of Catholics and only 4.5% of evangelicals. 3.9 times more Catholics report never reading the Bible in comparison to evangelicals.

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<sup>36</sup> We use the term “literalistic” here to refer to a “naively literalistic interpretation” of a scriptural text in distinction from a “literal sense” or “plain sense” reading. The former “excludes every effort at understanding the Bible that takes account of its historical origins and development” and that “often historicizes material which from the start never claimed to be historical.” See Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (1993) §I, F: <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/vatican-curia/abc-1993>



Given evangelicals' greater attachment to the study of the Bible,<sup>37</sup> it is reasonable to surmise they read more of the contents of the Christian Bible, namely the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. As noted above, the New Testament sometimes presupposes and sometimes ignores the multiple declarations of the covenant between God and the children of Israel that are found in the Old Testament. In addition, evangelicals tend to read the Bible as the literal Word of God,<sup>38</sup> whereas 62.3% of the Catholics in our survey did not share this view, saying either that the Bible is the word of God but should not be taken literally (40.9%) or that the Bible is the work of human beings inspired by God (21.4%).



<sup>37</sup> David Bebbington says a high regard for the Bible ("biblicism") is one of their four main characteristics; see his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1–17.

<sup>38</sup> See Inbari, Bumin, and Byrd, "Why Do Evangelicals Support Israel?": 1-36.

Taken together, these results might help explain why evangelical Christians in greater numbers than Catholic Christians acknowledge ongoing Jewish covenantal life with God. Catholics may be less likely to read the Old Testament's covenantal affirmations and are thus less inclined to read them literally or apply them to today. This conclusion has relevance for the subject of Catholic attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as will be seen below.

Catholic educators and preachers might well be concerned that over one-third of the respondents stated that the Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally, an opinion that is contrary to Catholic teaching and is a nearer to a viewpoint that the Catholic Church criticizes as "fundamentalist."<sup>39</sup> These results indicate that Catholics need more explicit formation in the Bible and its interpretation according to the Catholic understanding that "Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is the 'word of God in human language,' has been composed by human authors in all its various parts and in all the sources that lie behind them."<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. CATHOLICS AND THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Our survey yields significant insights about the attitudes of American Catholics toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their replies can also be compared with those given in a 2021 survey of evangelical Christians the year before.<sup>41</sup> It might be noted at the outset that 68.4% of the Catholic respondents and 64.5% of the evangelicals said they were not very knowledgeable about the conflict. Given the widespread perception of intense evangelical interest in the events in the Middle East, the similarity in these Catholic and evangelical responses is surprising.

When asked whom they supported in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the Catholics surveyed were three times more likely to support Israel than Palestinians.<sup>42</sup> 11.4% supported Palestinians in

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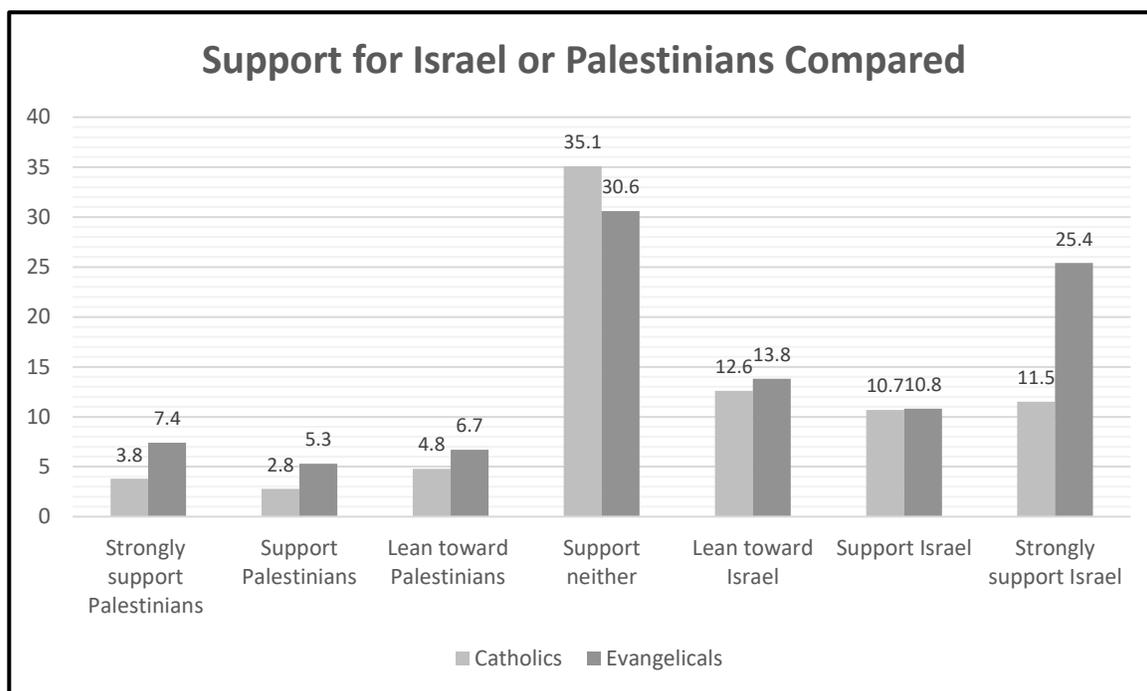
<sup>39</sup> PBC, "Interpretation of the Bible," §I, F: "The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. It can deceive these people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem. Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations."

<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.*, §I, A.

<sup>41</sup> Bumin and Inbari, "In the Shadow of 2021 Gaza Conflict." On evangelical Christian support for Israel there is a vast literature. See Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 82-110, 171-97; Jason Olson, *America's Road to Jerusalem: The Impact of the Six-Day War on Protestant Politics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Daniel Hummel, *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S-Israel Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

<sup>42</sup> In the options for this question, we referred to Israel (meaning the State, not the Israeli people) and to the Palestinians (a people, not a governmental and territorial entity that represents this people). On this complex terminological question we thought it important to acknowledge that this conflict pits stateless people against a nation-state. Exacerbating this disparity, the Palestinian government has been fragmented since 2006, with Hamas in control of Gaza and the Palestinian Authority controlling the West Bank. As a result, asking ordinary Americans, who may be poorly informed about this conflict, about the Palestinian government may be more confusing than clear. Similarly, asking respondents about their support for Israeli people, rather than Israel, can lead to responses that are difficult to interpret. Many Israelis do not support the occupation policies of the State of Israel and some of the Israeli citizens are not members of the titular nationality (Jews) and perceive the Israeli-Palestinian dispute in a fundamentally different way. The terminology we use here (the Palestinians vs. Israel) therefore presents a clearer, more consistent, and more accurate representation of the nature of the dispute. Moreover, this terminology reflects a common approach

varying degrees (very strong support: 3.8%; support: 2.8%; lean toward support: 4.8%), whereas 34.8% supported Israel (very strong support: 11.5%; support: 10.7%; lean toward support: 12.6%). More than half supported neither side (35.1%) or did not know how they felt about the conflict (18.7%). Evangelicals were even stronger in their support for Israel over the Palestinians. In the 2021 survey, 19.4% supported Palestinians to varying degrees, 50% supported Israel, and 31% supported neither.<sup>43</sup>



Using open-ended questions, the survey also invited the Catholic respondents to explain their preferences with regard to where they placed their support.<sup>44</sup> 411 explained why they supported neither side: they lacked sufficient knowledge or did not have reasons for their views (161), the conflict is not their problem (77), or they are neutral vis-à-vis the belligerents (48). A few respondents gave religious reasons for supporting neither: Christian love for all (13), their Catholic identity (8), or God’s ownership of the contested land (4). Others wrote that both Israelis and Palestinians are equal (16), both act improperly or immorally (26), both need to stop fighting (13), they did not want to judge (14), or it is too complicated to decide (8). Although the affirmation

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for many surveys over the last 75 years. Gallup, Pew, Roper, and other major surveys often refer to Israel and the Palestinians in relevant questions.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. However, the 2021 study of evangelicals differed significantly from earlier research in 2018 when more than 75% of the evangelicals reported support for Israel. Respondents in the 2021 sample were presumably exposed to more negative coverage of Israel than respondents in the 2018 sample, as analyzed in Inbari, Bumin, and Byrd, “Why Do Evangelicals Support Israel?” (2021). In fact, the timing of the 2021 survey was deliberate. Bumin and Inbari wanted to survey evangelical and born-again Christians shortly after the Gaza conflict (May 10-21, 2021) in order to assess how attitudes changed as a result of the violence and respondents’ exposure to the media coverage of the conflict (much of it critical of Israel).

<sup>44</sup> Sometimes more than one explanation was provided about a certain point, which can result in a greater number of responses than write-in respondents.

of the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to live in safety and security is the official diplomatic position of the Holy See,<sup>45</sup> none of the respondents cited this as their reason for their opinion.

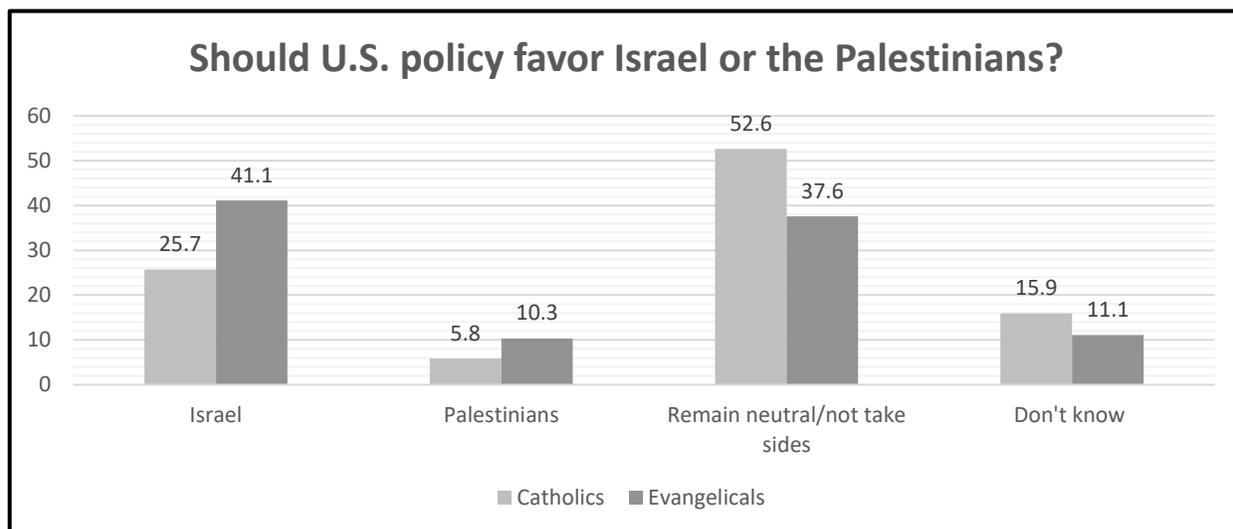
Of those who indicated that they supported Israel, 424 provided a written explanation of their positions. Some offered religious reasons: God promised the land to the Jews (112), biblical Israel possessed the land first (77), Jews believe in the same God (15), or Jews are God's or Jesus' people (14). Others gave social or political explanations: Palestinians are aggressors or terrorists (72), Jews are entitled to a homeland (19), Israel is an ally of the United States (12), and/or Israel needs help (8). Some stated that they did not know why they supported Israel or that they just did (56), while others gave vague or highly subjective or personal reasons such as Israel is better or more peaceful, I like Israelis better, or Jews are better people (44). A small number (11) said they supported both Israel and Palestinians after first stating support for Israel.

136 of those who supported Palestinians gave written explanations. 31 described Palestinians as the victims (31). Some gave reasons that mirrored ideas given by more pro-Israel respondents: Palestinians were on the land first (26), they believe in the same God (11), or they deserve a state (9). Some said they like Palestinians better (5), or they did not know why they supported the Palestinians (23). Comparatively very few gave explicitly religious reasons for supporting Palestinians. In addition to saying they both believe in the same God (noted above), respondents said Palestinians believe in God (11), respondents were motivated by Christian love (1), or Jews lost the land by the will of God (3). A small number (10) said they supported both Palestinians and Israel after first stating their support of Palestinians.

The Catholic survey, like the 2021 evangelical survey, asked what the participants thought of United States foreign policy with regard to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Among Catholics, 25.7% advocated that the U.S. embrace a pro-Israel policy (compared to 41.1% among evangelicals), 5.8% advocated a pro-Palestinian policy (compared to 10.3% among evangelicals), and 52.6% wanted the United States not to take sides (compared to 37.6% of evangelicals). A few more Catholics said they did not know how to answer this question than evangelicals (15.9% vs. 11% respectively).

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<sup>45</sup> E.g., Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Viennese Jewish Community," June 24, 1998: "[E]very initiative of the Holy See has to be understood, when it tries to seek the recognition of equal dignity for the Jewish people in the State of Israel and for the Palestinian people. ... [T]he Jewish people have a right to a homeland like any other nation, according to international law. The same goes also for the Palestinian people, many of whom are homeless and refugees. By a common readiness of understanding and compromise solutions can be found which lead to a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in this area." <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-88june24>. Many scholars have studied the Catholic Church's views of Israel (both the state and the land); for discussions of some of the theological issues, see Anthony Kenny, *Catholics, Jews, and the State of Israel* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist, 1993); Richard C. Lux, *The Jewish People, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2010); Philip A. Cunningham, "A Catholic Theology of the Land? The State of the Question," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 8 (2013): 1-15; Adam Gregerman, "Is the Biblical Land Promise Irrevocable?: Post-Nostri Aetate Catholic Theologies of the Jewish Covenant and the Land of Israel," *Modern Theology* 34 (2018): 137-58; and Gavin D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019) 64-143.



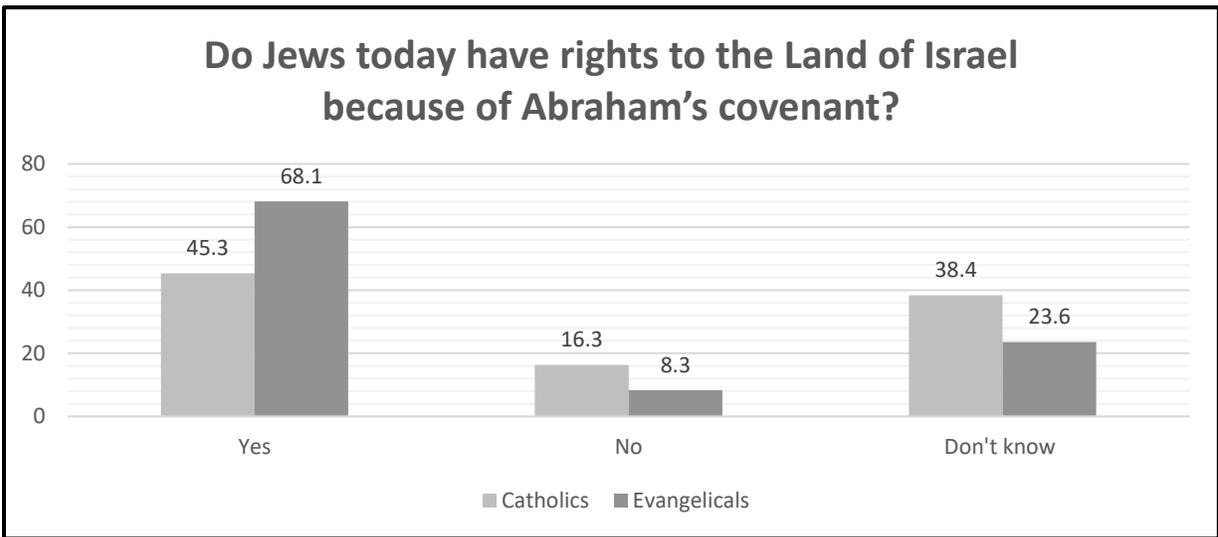
For both groups, a sizeable proportion of respondents either did not want to support either side or wanted American policy to be neutral. This was especially prominent among the Catholic respondents, suggesting a greater tendency to support balanced policies.

We also addressed more explicitly religious topics. For example, more than twice as many evangelicals as Catholics say that the teachings of their church make them more supportive of Israel (52.1% vs. 20.5%). Of Catholics, 72.1% say church teachings have nothing to do with their views (whether in support of Israel or the Palestinians) in comparison with 40% of evangelicals.

More than twice as many Catholics (38.8%) as evangelicals (15.7%) never hear their co-religionists talk about supporting Israel. On the other hand, twice as many evangelicals (41.3%) as Catholics (20.2%) hear their co-religionists talk once a month or weekly about supporting Israel. The implication of this comparison is that socialization with pro-Israel co-religionists appears to be a significant determinant of evangelicals' higher levels of support for Israel and may explain the comparatively lower levels observed among Catholics. Inbari and Bumin's statistical analyses confirm that socialization with pro-Israel evangelicals is one of the most consequential predictors of support for Israel among the members of this religious community.<sup>46</sup> Analyses of the data on Catholics, however, fail to yield a statistically-significant result for such socialization dynamics.

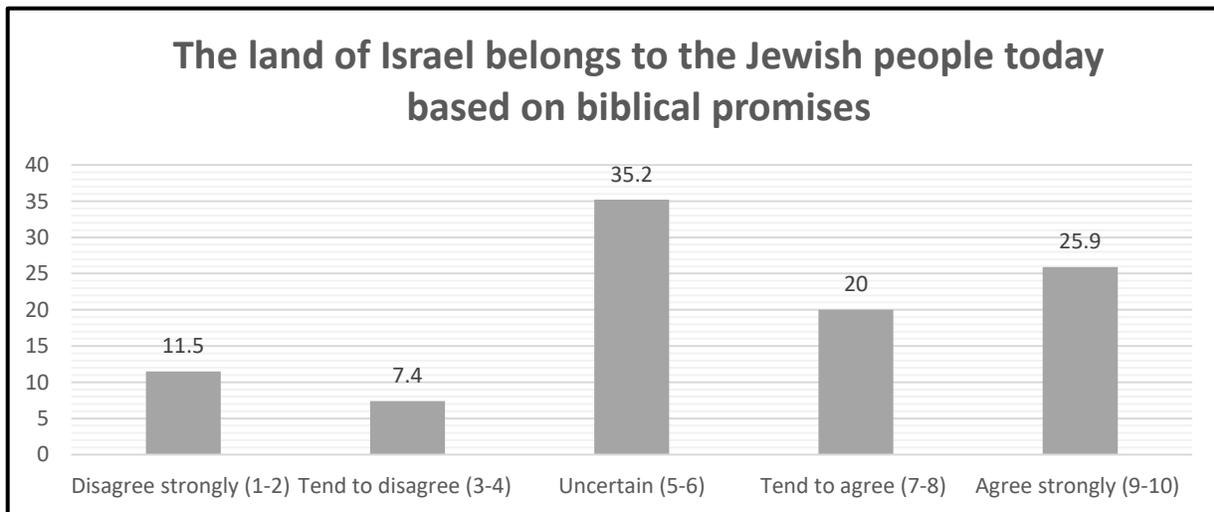
In addition, the survey asked if Jews today have the right to the land of Israel by virtue of the covenant God made with Abraham (in Genesis 12:7; 15:7; 17:8, and elsewhere). Of the Catholics, 45.3% responded affirmatively, while 38.4% said they did not know and 16.3% answered negatively. This contrasts with evangelical responses to the same question. 68.2% thought that Jews today had rights to the land of Israel because of the Abrahamic covenant—a difference of over 20% with Catholics—while 23.5% said they did not know and 8.3% answered that they disagreed.

<sup>46</sup> Inbari, Bumin, and Byrd, "Why do Evangelicals Support Israel?": 17-18.



In other words, Catholics were less inclined than evangelicals to invoke scripture in current geopolitical debates. Although it seems unlikely that the 55% of Catholic participants in the survey who said they did not know or answered negatively to the question about the Abrahamic covenant were aware of formal Vatican statements that caution against citing the Bible with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,<sup>47</sup> their replies were in line with them.

It might be conjectured that these results reflect less emphasis among Catholics on the Bible, which they do not see as the sole authority for grappling with contemporary issues. This might also connect with the responses elsewhere in the survey that 66.6% of the Catholics reported that they read the Bible never, seldom, or once or twice a month, and only 23% that they read it at least once a week or every day. This is in contrast to the 53.5% of evangelicals who read it frequently and 37.7% who read it infrequently.



<sup>47</sup> See especially the CRRJ, “Notes”: “The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law” (§VI, 25).

Similar Catholic responses resulted from the closely related question elsewhere in the survey that asked if participants agreed (on a scale of 1-10) with the statement that the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people today based on biblical promises. Again, while more Catholics were inclined to agree with the statement (45.9%) rather than disagree (18.9%), many respondents (35.2%) expressed uncertainty. Perhaps as one might expect, the percentage who agreed with this statement is almost identical to the percentage who agreed that Jews have rights to the land based on Abraham's covenant (45.3%).

For both of these two related questions—whether Jews today have a right to the land of Israel because of biblical promises or God's covenant with Abraham—Catholics, unsurprisingly, were more likely to respond positively if they had social contact with Jews. They were also more likely to agree with both statements if they read the Bible literalistically and so more likely to apply biblical texts to contemporary geopolitical issues.

On the other hand, Catholics who believe that Jewish covenantal life with God endures (which is Catholic teaching) also were more likely to answer these two questions affirmatively, meaning that the covenant has consequences for current geopolitical matters (which is not Catholic teaching). This suggests that the opinions of the respondents were not directly shaped by official Catholic teaching, which perhaps coheres with 72.1% stating that Church teachings have nothing to do with their support for Israel or the Palestinians (in comparison with 40% of evangelicals in the 2021 Bumin-Inbari survey).

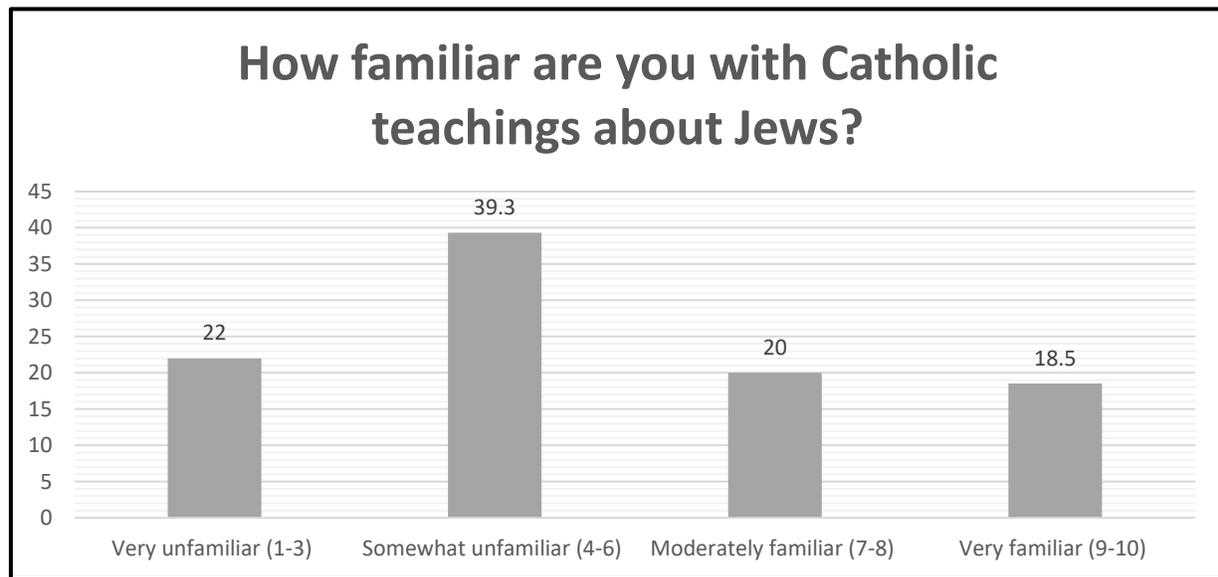
## 5. FAMILIARITY WITH CURRENT CATHOLIC TEACHING

As noted early in this article, since the Catholic Church has a highly centralized teaching authority or magisterium, it has been possible to compare the ideas of American Catholics with the official beliefs and teachings of their Church, some of which have changed or evolved since the issuance of *Nostra Aetate* in 1965.<sup>48</sup> The survey gives the overall impression that the respondents generally have positive attitudes of and good relationships with American Jews and do not hold the anti-Jewish views that were common before the Second Vatican Council, such as holding that all Jews were guilty of the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus.

At the same time, the respondents seemed unacquainted with the details of post-conciliar official teachings of the Catholic Church on Jews and Judaism. The survey assessed both how well respondents *thought* they knew Church teaching and how well they *actually* did know it. First, respondents were asked on a scale of 1 to 10 to rate their knowledge of “Catholic Church teachings about Jews.” Nearly 40% were confident about their level of knowledge with regard to contemporary Catholic teaching. 18.6% claimed to be very familiar, and another 20% said they were moderately familiar. Only a small number (22%) claimed to be very or somewhat unfamiliar.

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<sup>48</sup> Two recent surveys of Church teachings on Jews and Judaism are Cunningham, *Seeking Shalom* and D'Costa, *Catholic Doctrines*.



We reviewed the responses of the entire sample to several relevant questions to assess whether they were congruent with ecclesiastical teaching or not, as has been discussed by topic above. To summarize:

- When asked in two distinct questions if Jews enjoy a special or covenantal relationship with God, less than half of the survey participants thought so (35.9% and 41.7%). This is contrary to Catholic doctrine which teaches that God made with Jews “a covenant of eternal love which was never revoked.”<sup>49</sup>
- 70% of the respondents stated that “the Jews” were not to blame for the crucifixion of Jesus, which agrees with Catholic teaching. However, 30% either did hold Jews responsible or did not know whom to hold accountable, which does not represent Catholic teaching.
- Most respondents (67.1%) supported having non-conversionary interreligious dialogue with Jews, which accords with the Catholic Church’s position. Those who supported efforts to convert Jews (12.7%) were often biblical literalists and/or felt (incorrectly) they were familiar Catholic teaching.
- Over one-third of the respondents stated that the Bible is the word of God and should be taken literally, an opinion that is contrary to Catholic teaching and is a nearer to a viewpoint that the Catholic Church criticizes as “fundamentalist.”<sup>50</sup> This is significant because those with this perspective about the Bible were more likely to blame “the Jews” for the crucifixion and to think that Jewish covenantal life had ended.
- The majority of the respondents either did not support one side over the other (35.1%) or did not know whom to support (18.7%) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is in harmony with the Vatican’s typically even-handed policy.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, almost

<sup>49</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Address to the American Jewish Leaders,” September 11, 1983, §1: [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19870911\\_jewish-org.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1987/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19870911_jewish-org.html)

<sup>50</sup> PBC, “Interpretation” §I, F, “Fundamentalism.”

<sup>51</sup> E.g., Pope Benedict XVI, “Farewell Address to President Mahmoud Abbas,” May 13, 2009: “[I] urge those involved in peace negotiations to work towards a just solution that respects the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians

three times as many Catholics supported Israel over the Palestinians (34.8% vs. 13.4%). Additionally, most respondents were hesitant to appeal to the Bible for solutions to the contemporary clash, which is consistent with Catholic teaching. Nonetheless, many (just under 50%) also affirmed a Jewish right to the land based on both Abraham's covenant and the biblical promises. In other words, on this topic there is a mixed picture about consistency with relevant Catholic teaching or policy.

Beyond these observations, there was additional and paradoxical evidence that anti-Jewish sentiments were 19.5% more likely among those who claimed to be very familiar with Catholic teaching, 15.6% more likely among those who said they were greatly influenced by the Catholic Church in their political, social, and moral values, and 19.2% more likely among regular churchgoers.<sup>52</sup>

As noted at the outset, we did not in this article treat the survey's results with regard to the demographics of the respondents. However, it should be mentioned that the respondents' age played a significant role. Fewer respondents under 30 years old said that Jews enjoy an ongoing relationship with God than older ones (30% vs. 36.8%). Similarly, 32.5% of Catholics under 30 thought that Jewish covenantal life with God continues, while 43.1% of older Catholics thought so. 15.6% of young Catholics as compared with 6.5% of older Catholics thought that the Jewish covenant with God had ended. Catholics over 30 were more seriously worried about antisemitism (40.2%) than those under 30 (24.4%).<sup>53</sup>

One can speculate about possible reasons for these results. For instance, younger Catholics had socialized less with Jewish friends than older Catholics (60.6% vs. 70.3%) and had less job experience working alongside Jews (37.5% vs. 58.5%).

These divergent results according to the age of the Catholic respondents also comport well with the findings by Inbari and Bumin among evangelical and born-again Christians, where the age of a respondent was one of the strongest predictors of support for Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, even after controlling for the effects of theological and political factors. The authors found across multiple surveys that the under-30 evangelicals were significantly less pro-Israel than the older generations.<sup>54</sup> Similar findings for Catholics could point to broader generational differences in American society across different religious groups.<sup>55</sup>

Another trend was that more regular churchgoers were 19.2% more likely to have negative ideas about Jews and Judaism than infrequent worshippers. Similarly, those who said they were very familiar with Catholic teachings about Jews were 19.5% more likely to be supersessionists.

Taken together, these findings both about age and about Catholic knowledge and practice suggest that Catholic religious education and/or Catholic liturgy are not currently promoting

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alike.”

[https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090513\\_farewell-betlemme.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090513_farewell-betlemme.html)

<sup>52</sup> Anti-Jewish sentiments in this instance are proxied by respondents' assent that Jews were cursed by God or replaced by Christians in God's favor. These results reflect examination of odds ratios of the ordinal logistic regression.

<sup>53</sup> Additionally, some confirmatory results that were within or close to the margin of error of +/-3.2% showed that Catholics under 30 were more likely than older Catholics to believe that Jews were cursed by God (6.3% vs. 4%) or replaced by Christians (11.3% vs. 8.7%).

<sup>54</sup> Motti Inbari and Kirill Bumin, *Christian Zionism in the Twenty-First Century: Evangelical Public Opinion on Israel* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming 2024).

<sup>55</sup> On the decline in support for Israel among younger Americans see: Amnon Cavari and Guy Freeman, *American Public Opinion Toward Israel: From Consensus to Divide* (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), 102-107.

“genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant”<sup>56</sup> as well as might be hoped. Many respondents, despite positive views of Jews and Judaism, seemed unacquainted (or—less likely—disagreed) with post-conciliar teachings of the Catholic Church. This may suggest that except for fundamental doctrines (e.g., Jews cannot be collectively blamed for the crucifixion of Jesus) American Catholic views arise less from detailed knowledge of Catholic teaching than from living in a society that is pluralistic and in which members of different religious groups often interact.<sup>57</sup>

Recognizing that only a minority of American Catholics are regular churchgoers and that the number of Catholic grammar and high schools is declining, the survey nonetheless points to a need in Catholic formation for more focused preaching and education about ongoing Jewish covenantal life and Catholic principles of biblical interpretation. In particular, the survey indicates that the Vatican directive that “the Jews and Judaism should not occupy an occasional and marginal place in catechesis: their presence there is essential and should be organically integrated,”<sup>58</sup> has not been measurably enacted.

## CONCLUSION

Roman Catholic leaders historically taught contempt for Jews. Preachers in every age blamed Jews collectively for crucifying Jesus, taught that the Church had replaced Jews as God’s Chosen People, and insisted that only baptism would save Jews from God’s curse upon them. Almost sixty years ago, during the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church repudiated such teachings. This first-of-a-kind survey shows that the attitudes of American Catholics toward Jews reveal little of that traditional hostility. Still, it also demonstrates that relevant Catholic teachings on Jews and Judaism have not been well communicated to the American Catholic population.

We were fortunate to be able to compare Catholic attitudes to those of American evangelicals; thus, we were able to find significant similarities and differences. To get a fuller picture of Catholics’ attitudes toward Jews and Israel, a good way to move forward would be to compare Catholics in Europe, South America, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Such research should examine to what extent Catholicism worldwide is impacted by Church teachings, how the Church’s official views are being received, and to what extent Catholics are influenced by their non-Catholic surroundings. Sixty years after *Nostra Aetate*, it is timely to examine how Catholics worldwide have responded to it. Studying American Catholic attitudes toward Jews uncovers only one piece of a larger puzzle.

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<sup>56</sup> Pope John Paul II, “Confession of Sins Against the People of Israel” at the Mass for Pardon at Saint Peter’s Basilica, March 12, 2000

(<https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/pope-john-paul-ii/jp2-00mar12>) and “Prayer at the Western Wall,” March 26, 2000 ([https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20000326\\_jerusalem-prayer.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jan-mar/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000326_jerusalem-prayer.html)) Holy Land: Prayer at the Western Wall (March 26, 2000) | John Paul II (vatican.va).

<sup>57</sup> The current survey does not allow us to analyze to what extent the attitudes of American Catholics are determined by their Catholic or by their American backgrounds. This deserves further investigation.

<sup>58</sup> CRRJ, “Notes,” (§I, 2).