

COMMENTS OF MARY C. BOYS

President-elect Peter Phan has requested a presentation on *Dominus Iesus* (*DI*) from the standpoint of my involvement in Jewish-Christian dialogue. Accordingly, I will focus on these questions:

- What does *DI* say about Judaism, and about Catholicism's relationship with Jews and Judaism?
- What is the Jewish response to *DI*?
- How does one involved in Catholic-Jewish dialogue assess *DI*?

DOMINUS IESUS AND JUDAISM

On an explicit level, *DI* says very little about Judaism. The one clear reference to Judaism appears in #13. It situates salvation in Jesus as the initial encounter with the Jewish people that led to the "fulfillment of salvation that went beyond the Law."¹

A number of interpreters suggest that because recent Vatican teaching, including *DI*, does not subsume Judaism under the rubric of a non-Christian religion, Judaism cannot be categorized with other "gravely deficient" religions. This now seems to be an "official" interpretation. During the recent meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, 1-4 May 2001,² Walter Cardinal Kasper, newly appointed president of the Commission on Religious Relations with Jews, and Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, the outgoing president, both stated that because the declaration does not speak about Judaism, it has, therefore, no effect on Catholic teaching about Jews and Judaism.³ Kasper

¹"It was in the awareness of the one universal gift of salvation offered by the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:3-14), that the first Christians encountered the Jewish people, showing them the fulfillment of salvation that went beyond the Law, and, in the same awareness, they confronted the pagan world of their time, which aspired to salvation through a plurality of saviors."

²This involved the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), constituted by representatives from eleven major Jewish organizations, and representatives of the Vatican's Commission on Religious Relations with Jews. This was the seventeenth meeting of the committee.

³Cardinal Kasper's address on 1 May 2001 to the International Liaison Committee, as well as the documents issued by the ILC, may be found at <www.nccbuscc.org/seia/kasper.htm> or at <www.bc.edu/bc_org/research/cjl/articles/kasper_dominus_iesus.htm>. Kasper notes that while it was not the intention of *DI* to "hurt or offend," it nonetheless did, "and for this I can only express my profound regret." *DI*, Cardinal Kasper says, "argues against some newer relativistic and to some degree syncretistic theories among Christian theologians, theories spread in India and in the western so-called postmodern world as well, which advocate a pluralistic vision of religion and classify both Jewish and Christian religion under the category of 'world religions.'" It "argues against theories that

emphasized two points. First, Catholic-Jewish relations are not a subset of interreligious relations in general, neither in theory (Judaism is unique among the world's religions because of its theological connection with Christianity) nor in practice (the Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews exists under the rubric of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, not the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue). Second, *DI* must be read in the context of other magisterial documents; it does not cancel, revoke or nullify such documents. Eugene Fisher, associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs for the U.S. Catholic Bishops, has been arguing this line with considerable force. Dialogue with Jews, Fisher argues, is unique, and "it really is an untenable position to argue that *DI* can have, within the Church's overall magisterial teaching, a negative impact on a subject it does not take up, not even indirectly or by implication."⁴

I believe such interpretation of *DI* represents a generous reading of the document. I agree with Cardinals Kasper and Cassidy that *Dominus Iesus* is not intended to replace existing magisterial teachings on Judaism, but it is important to note that *DI* neither cites nor makes reference to any of these documents.⁵

deny the specific identity of Jewish and Christian religion, and do not take into account the distinction between faith as answer to God's revelation and belief as human search for God and human religious wisdom. Thus, the Declaration defends the specific revelation character of the Hebrew Bible too, which we Christians call the Old Testament, against theories claiming, for example, that the Holy Books of Hinduism are the Old Testament for Hindus. But this gave rise to misunderstandings. Some Jewish readers tend to think that the Church's attitude towards Jews and Judaism is a subcategory of its attitude towards world religions in general. Yet, such a presumption is a mistake, and so is the presumption that the document represents 'a backward step in a concerted attempt to overturn the [in this case Catholic-Jewish] dialogue of recent decades.' I am quoting here a comment made by a Jewish scholar. This misunderstanding can be avoided if the Declaration is read and interpreted—as any magisterial document should—in the larger context of all other official documents and declarations, which are by no means cancelled, revoked or nullified by this document. . . . Thus the document *Dominus Iesus* does not affect Catholic-Jewish relations in a negative way. Because of its purpose, it does not deal with the question of the theology of Catholic-Jewish relations, proclaimed by *Nostra Aetate*, and of subsequent Church teaching. What the document tries to 'correct' is another category, namely the attempts by some Christian theologians to find a kind of 'universal theology' of interreligious relations, which, in some cases, has led to indifferentism, relativism and syncretism. Against such theories we, as Jews and Christians, are on the same side, sitting in the same boat; we have to fight, to argue and to bear witness together. Our common self-understanding is at stake."

⁴Fisher has expressed this interpretation in numerous conversations. This particular wording comes from an e-mail of 23 April 2001.

⁵See Helga Croner, ed., *More Stepping Stones to Christian-Jewish Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents, 1975–1983*, A Stimulus Book (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1985); Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., *Spiritual*

Moreover, little attention is given to analyzing how various ecclesial documents stand in tension with each other. One thinks of the thoroughly supersessionist approach of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and its advocacy of biblical typology in contrast to the more nuanced (if not fully satisfactory) position of the 1985 *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*.⁶ Lurking behind *DI*'s one explicit mention of Judaism in #13 is the supersessionist claim that Christians showed the Jewish people the "fulfillment of salvation that went beyond the Law"—an assertion that at least implicitly presents Judaism as legalistic. *DI* seems to take no account of Pope John Paul's description of Jews as the "people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God."⁷

It seems illogical to claim that *DI* has nothing to do with teaching about Judaism. The definitive character of the declaration seems to allow for no exceptions. *DI* works with three categories of religions: (1) *Roman Catholicism*; (2) *other Christian churches* (distinguishing between those with apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, on the one hand, and, on the other, "ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the eucharistic mystery [and therefore] are not churches in the proper sense," #17); and (3) *other religions* (or *other religious traditions*). In view of such a sweeping scope, can we really conclude that the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith has omitted Judaism from consideration? After all, if "Jesus Christ is the . . . universal mediator (#11), and "one can and must say" that his significance and value for "the human race and its history . . . are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute. . . for the salvation of all" (#15), then why would Jews be exempt from these claims?⁸

Pilgrimage: [Pope John Paul II] *Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979–1995* (New York: Crossroad, 1995). In footnotes 3 and 23, *DI* refers to *Nostra aetate*; in the former, no specific section is mentioned, although it appears to be from #2, and the latter refers to #2. Only *Nostra aetate* #4 deals with Judaism.

⁶See Philip A. Cunningham, *Education for Shalom* (Philadelphia: American Interfaith Institute, 1995) 136–52.

⁷Pope John Paul II, "Address to the Jewish Community—West Germany, November 17, 1980," in *Spiritual Pilgrimage*, 13–16, citation from p. 15; emphasis added.

⁸See John T. Pawlikowski, "Jewish-Christian Relations in the Global Society: What the Institutional Documents Have and Have Not Been Telling Us," paper presented to "Jews and Christians in Conversation: A Cross-Generational Conference," Cambridge, UK, 25 March 2001: "Despite the claims of some Catholic leaders that *Dominus Iesus* does not apply to Catholicism's relationship the Jewish people, the doctrinal congregation's statements would seem to be universal. Surely if it had wished to exclude the Jews, *Dominus Iesus* could have stated this explicitly" (p. 4).

JEWISH RESPONSES TO DOMINUS IESUS

Formal Jewish response to this document has been relatively reserved, though in private many Jews express grave concern.

One respondent, Edward Kessler, director of the Centre for Jewish-Christian Relations in Cambridge, UK engaged in a lively dialogue with Eugene Fisher in *The Tablet* (18 November 2000).⁹ Among the points he raises, three in particular deserve consideration. The first involves the timing of the document, (dated August 6, 2000 but issued on September 5, 2000) so close to the beatification of Pope Pius IX (September 3, 2000); for Kessler, the timing raises questions of whether it "represents a concerted attempt to reverse the advances that emerged from the Second Vatican Council."¹⁰ Second, Kessler observes that one of the great achievements of the forty years of dialogue has been "the development of a feeling of worth and admiration," but "*Dominus Iesus* takes a step backwards, since it portrays the other as inferior and unworthy." Finally, he expresses fear that in the twilight of this papacy "those who are not committed to the dialogue will refer to documents such as *DI* and use it to negative ends."

Historian and Orthodox rabbi David Berger has offered the most detailed Jewish critique. Berger rejects the assertion that Jews are excluded from *DI*, since

the central theme of the entire declaration, underscored on virtually every page, is that salvation comes in only one essential fashion for all humanity, and that is through the triune God of Christianity and his embodied Word. To suggest that Jews, who reject belief in both trinity and incarnation, attain salvation outside this otherwise universal system is to render the document virtually incoherent.¹¹

Berger's principal concern is the document's inclusion of interreligious dialogue as "part of her [the church's] evangelizing mission."¹² This, in Berger's view, "effectively expects Jews to participate in an endeavor officially described as an effort to lead them, however gently and indirectly, to accept beliefs antithetical to the core of their faith."¹³ Cardinal Kasper's forthright statement at

⁹Eugene J. Fisher and Edward Kessler, "Dialogue of Head and Heart," *The Tablet* (18 November 2000) at <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/cgi-bin/archive_db.cgi?tablet-00459>.

¹⁰The beatification of Pope Pius IX was especially problematic for Jews in light of the pope's role in the Edgardo Mortara affair: see David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

¹¹David Berger, "On *Dominus Iesus* and the Jews," paper presented to the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, 1 May 2001, p. 3.

¹²"Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary." [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #851] Interreligious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*" (#22).

¹³Berger, "On *Dominus Iesus* and the Jews," 9. Berger locates his concern not simply

the outset of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee meeting, "There can be no Catholic mission to the Jews," helped to quell Jewish fears. Nonetheless, by leaving evangelization undefined, *DI* causes considerable apprehension among Jews. Now that Vatican documents have a global outreach through the Internet, writers cannot take for granted that readers beyond the Catholic world will understand terms that have specific Catholic connotations. Most, for example, will quite naturally conflate evangelization with evangelism, unaware of the wide-ranging definition *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) has given to evangelization.

with this passage from *DI*, but traces it to other statements from the prefect of the CDF, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Mindful of Cardinal Kasper's observation that *DI* should not be considered "Ratzinger's document," I nonetheless believe Berger is right to follow the trail of thought behind *DI*, though it goes beyond Ratzinger personally—perhaps we might speak of a "Ratzinger circle of thought." Methodologically, *Dominus Iesus* follows the theological contours of its 1997 predecessor, "Christianity and World Religions" (*Origins* 27/10 [14 August 1997]: 149-66). Written by the International Theological Commission, that document takes up the salvific value of other religions, concluding that they can exercise the function of a *praeparatio evangelica*. Like *DI*, "Christianity and World Religions" denies the *theological* legitimacy of religious pluralism. It does so, however, by constructing a typology of positions, directing its principal argument against the "plurality of religions school." Without naming the theologians against whom they are writing, or citing any specific works, the commission conflates and compresses their theological views in such a way they become caricatures. The "plurality of religions" has become a single school denoting one position—and an errant one at that. A bit of detective work reveals the real culprits in the commission's eyes: John Hick and Paul Knitter, subjects of an extended critique in an address in 1996 by Cardinal Ratzinger. The cardinal's concern in this address? "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today" (*Origins* 26/20 [31 October 1996]: 309-17). More disturbing are two statements from Ratzinger, both cited in *Commonweal*: "In Need of Clarification," *Commonweal* 137/20 (November 17, 2000): 6. In a public debate on 22 September 2000 with philosopher Paolo Flores d'Arcais, Ratzinger said: "Jews are connected with God in a special way and that God does not allow that bond to fail . . . the fact remains, however, that our Christian conviction is that Christ is also the messiah of Israel. Certainly it is in the hands of God how and when the unification of Jews and Christians into the people of God will take place." In an interview with journalist Peter Seewald, included in a 20 October 2000 publication, *God and the World*, Ratzinger says, "It's true, we're waiting for the moment when Israel will say yes to Christ." A similar statement occurs in an article in the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. Ratzinger, speaking of a new vision of Christian-Jewish relations after the Shoah, says that Christians must first pray that God "gives all of us Christians greater esteem and love for this people, the Israelites," still God's chosen people from whom Christians inherited their faith in God. Christians should also ask God to give Jews "a greater knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, their son" (*Origins* 30/30 [11 January 2001]). Such ambiguous statements ought to give pause to those who believe *DI* has nothing to say about Judaism.

INSIDE THE DIALOGUE: A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

From my perspective, *Dominus Iesus* retards thinking about interreligious dialogue, and has caused rifts in relationships painstakingly built over the years. It oversimplifies the meaning of religious pluralism by conflating it with relativism, and reducing theologies of pluralism to the work of a few. Even more troubling, it judges dialogue from a position of omniscience; in the CDF's eyes, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue appear to be entirely peripheral to Catholic self-understanding. The declaration bears absolutely no indication of learning from the religious other. Indeed, one might conclude from *DI* that the only reason Catholics might engage in ecumenical or interreligious dialogue would be in the interests of proselytizing. Finally, it resists any attempts to rethink traditional doctrinal formulae, which are untouched by the past thirty-five years of encounter with the religious other. It would be tragic if the authoritarian tone with which *DI* speaks drowns out the voices of serious practitioners of dialogue and scholars of religion.

I conclude on a personal note. As one privileged to be a frequent guest at the *Shabbat* dinner table, to work closely with Jewish educators, to experience something of the profundity of Jewish liturgy and prayer, and, above all, to have close Jewish friends, I have an abiding respect, even awe, for the depth of Jewish tradition. The way of Torah certainly seems to me salvific for those who walk in it.

How the more accurate understanding of Judaism and the close relationships developed in our time will animate theological expression is an unfinished work. We may not yet have fully adequate theologies of pluralism—or even relatively adequate ones—but their blanket condemnation in *Dominus Iesus* overlooks promising pathways, prematurely settles complex issues, places learned, creative theologians under a cloud of threat, and is tone deaf to the rich resonance dialogue with Jews brings to Catholic life.

MARY C. BOYS, S.N.J.M.
Union Theological Seminary
New York City