

CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

Topic: Catholic and Jews as People of God:
The Vatican II Challenge to the Bishops
Convener: Elena G. Procario-Foley, Iona College
Moderator: Tobie Tondi, Rosemont College
Presenters: Carol Ann Martinelli, Independent Scholar
Elizabeth Groppe, Xavier University
Angela Kim Harkins, Fairfield University
Respondent: Michael Berenbaum, University of Judaism

The 2007 Convention marked the fourth consecutive year that CTSA theologians gathered as a selected session to consider theology from the perspective of the renewed relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Our panelists explored the biblical, historical, and theological dimensions of the phrase “people of God” with particular attention to its development before, during, and after the Second Vatican Council. The question and answer period augmented the formal papers.

Carol Ann Martinelli analyzed the use of the phrase “people of God” from *Nostra Aetate* (NA) and *Lumen Gentium* (LG) through the *Catechism*. She then articulated the bishops’ responsibility to teach the Church’s theology of the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people as formulated in the conciliar and postconciliar documents. Martinelli’s fundamental position is that LG and other Vatican II documents present a classic replacement theology that excludes the Jewish people from consideration as the “people of God” *despite* NA’s declaration that God does not revoke God’s promises. She notes that NA struggles with the tension of maintaining the superiority of the Church’s salvation even while affirming a positive new relationship between the Church and Judaism. Nonetheless, according to Martinelli, NA represents a crucial “first small break in the wall of supersessionism.” She argues that, twenty years after NA, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis* has significantly advanced the Church’s position by emphasizing the interwoven identities of Judaism and Christianity and recognizing Judaism as a living reality. For Martinelli, NA, LG, and the documents that follow them cumulatively, albeit ambiguously, teach that the Jewish people must be understood by Christians to be part of the “people of God.” The bishops have the responsibility to teach and foster this new theology of Judaism.

Elizabeth Groppe guided us through the complex developments of the phrase “people of God” before and during the Council. (Due to a family emergency, Groppe was unable to attend and her paper was delivered by Paul Lakeland.) After surveying key moments in the origins of NA, Groppe examined Yves Congar’s role in crafting chapter two of LG and that document’s use of the phrase “people of God.”

Though Martinelli had chastised Yves Congar for celebrating the Church’s exclusionary retrieval of the notion “people of God” without any reference to the genocide of the Jewish people, Groppe reminded us that the scholarship that fed the Council was primarily that of *ressourcement* and there was precious little positive Christian theology of Judaism to recover. Nonetheless, Congar’s preconciliar the-

ology with respect to Judaism is remarkable, according to Groppe, because he maintained, *prior* to NA, that God's covenant with the Jewish people is not revoked. Groppe's constructive comparison of the different uses of the phrase "people of God" in LG and NA focused on the relationship between the Jewish people and the church, and LG's distinction of Israel's election in the flesh and Christian election in the Spirit. Differing with Martinelli, she argues that the use of "people of God" in LG should be understood as a fulfillment theology and not a replacement theology and as such it is a positive step in a Christian theology of Judaism. Further, Groppe underscores that the unity of God's people is at the heart of LG's theology of the people of God. She thus challenges us to "articulate a theology of the unity of the holy people of God that honors both the significance of the Christ event and the integrity of Jewish self-understanding." Groppe suggests that such a theology will first acknowledge the "profound fracture" in the relationship between Christians and Jews and then begin from the premise that "all humanity is called from our broken and wounded state to become one people of God."

Angela Harkins probed the complexities of the theological use of the phrase "people of God" by a careful exploration of its biblical precedents. Harkins contends that there is no univocal biblical use of "people of God" in the Hebrew Bible. In fact, there are several biblical phrases that feed the Christian theological appropriation of "people of God." Consequently it is imperative for Harkins that a theological use of the "people of God" accounts for the diverse ways in which the concept was used throughout biblical Judaism, Second Temple Judaism, and early Judaism. Further, she argues that the Council used the phrase in an inclusionary way that is not supported by the various exclusionary uses of the phrase in the Hebrew Bible. Harkins persuasively argues that "the Council's use of the expression 'The People of God' is not a simple retrieval of a biblical notion of Israel's relationship to YHWH, but rather, it is a summary of a theological idea from a contemporary context that effectively conceals many of ancient Israel's and classical Judaism's particular self-understandings and experiences."

Michael Berenbaum raised three important issues. Given the reality of sin, he cautioned that a theology of the people of God should be understood in terms of aspiration rather than achievement. Secondly, he suggested that the most important contemporary religious issue is how to make room for the other religious person while remaining faithful to one's own tradition. Finally, he claimed that the new relationship between Catholicism and Judaism after the rupture of the *Shoah* is the strongest part of the repaired relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

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