Critical Analysis of:

“The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations”¹

published by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews on December 10, 2015²

by Robert Sungenis, Ph.D.

Overview

The Commission’s document is the latest post-Vatican II attempt to forge an ecumenical and political relationship with the Jews, Judaism and Israel. The Commission states up front, however, that “the text is not a magisterial document or doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church, but is a reflection...on current theological questions that have developed since the Second Vatican Council.” Although the Commission admits that Jesus Christ remains a divisive issue between the Jews and the Catholic Church, nevertheless it pushes forward by trying to minimize the doctrinal issues and maximize the humanitarian issues. In the process, unfortunately, the Commission sacrifices major Catholic doctrines on the altar of the Social gospel. The chief aberration in this regard is the Commission’s insistence that there remains an *unrevoked and exclusive covenant between God and Israel*, which becomes the foundation for the entire document. The Commission states that its official source for Catholic/Jewish relations is Vatican II’s *Nostra aetate*, and although admitting that a covenant between God and Israel “cannot be explicitly read into Nostra aetate,” nevertheless, the Commission argues that *Nostra aetate* is “located within a decidedly theological framework regarding...God’s unrevoked covenant with Israel.” The Commission then attempts to justify its position by an unconventional interpretation of various scripture passages (e.g., Romans 9:4; 11:29; Hebrews 8:1-13; 10:9) and an uncontextualized statement in a speech by John Paul II from Mainz, Germany in 1980. In the end, on the basis that the Jews, as a religious and ethnic body, are in an unrevoked covenant with God, the Commission then concludes: (1) the covenant puts the Jews on a higher spiritual level with God than the rest of humanity; (2) as such, the Catholic Church, as an institution, is not required to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Jews and the Jews are not required to adopt it; and (3) all this is permitted because the Commission believes that God promised to save the Jews and thus He will do so by a means and at a time of which we are not aware. The Commission also argues that this new development in doctrine is needed because preaching the Christian Gospel to the Jews often leads to anti-semitism and catastrophic events like the holocaust. Finally, since these new developments remove the major obstacles for both sides, Catholics and Jews can then proceed in their ecumenical relations and social actions unhindered by doctrinal divides. In this paragraph-by-paragraph critique, we show that all this kind of thinking is indefensible.

Robert Sungenis

² The signers to the Commission’s document are: Cardinal KURT KOCH: President; The Most Reverend BRIAN FARRELL: Vice-President; The Reverend NORBERT HOFMANN, SDB; Secretary
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Introduction

R. Sungenis: First, my qualifications to analyze and critique the Commission’s document is based on my forty years of education and study in theology and biblical exegesis, which I believe fulfills the requirements of Canon 212:2-3, which states:

The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires. According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.

One example of how my expertise has helped the Church was demonstrated in 2008 when a highly problematic statement on page 131 of the 2006 United States Catholic Catechism for Adults was officially removed. The sentence states: “Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them.” I pointed out to the bishops that the basic problem with the sentence is that Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are quite clear that the Mosaic covenant between God and the Jews was nullified and revoked when Jesus died on the cross. The information I provided to the bishops was contained in a 15-page critique I wrote in 2007 specifically against the 2006 Catechism’s teaching. The paper was sent on December 6, 2007 to the residing general secretary of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Monsignor David J. Malloy, STD; and to William Cardinal Levada, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, both acknowledging my paper in return letters. Monsignor Malloy’s letter denied that there was any problem with the sentence on page 131, and further stated that the Vatican had issued a “recognitio” approving the 2006 United States catechism. An expanded version of my letters to the USCCB and the CDF was published as an article in the January 2008 issue of Culture Wars, edited by E. Michael Jones. Eight months later, in August 2008, the bishops of the USCCB voted in executive session, 231 to 14, to remove the problematic sentence from page 131. In turn, the CDF issued a second “recognitio” in 2009 approving the USCCB’s decision. I do not reveal these facts to take pride in the matter, but only to exhibit my qualifications in critiquing the present document from the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published on December 10, 2015, which touches on the same subject matter.

Although progressivists have been pushing for the novel concept of an “unrevoked” Jewish covenant for quite some time, the 2006 United States Catholic Catechism for Adults was the first time that a specific reference to “Moses” was designated as the essence of an unbroken covenant between God and the Jews. Prior attempts referred only to “the Old Covenant” with little or no specification as to what constituted that covenant. The only other specific reference appeared in the September 1988 document “God’s Mercy Endures Forever: Guidelines on the Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching” authored by the United

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3 cf., 2Cor 3:6-14; Col. 2:14-15; Eph. 2:14-15; Heb. 7:18; 8:1-13; 10:9-16; Councils of Florence and Trent; Pope Pius XII, Mystici Corporis, 29-30; St. Augustine, St. Thomas, et al.

States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy. In that document a brief reference was made to the presumed validity of the “Sinai covenant” for the Jews ("Sinai" being synonymous with the Mosaic covenant). The document stated:

6) ...some Christians over the centuries continued to dichotomize the Bible into two mutually contradictory parts. They argued, for example, that the New Covenant "abrogated" or "superseded" the Old, and that the Sinai Covenant was discarded by God and replaced with another. The Second Vatican Council, in Dei Verbum and Nostra Aetate, rejected these theories of the relationship between the Scriptures. In a major address in 1980, Pope John Paul II linked the renewed understanding of Scripture with the Church’s understanding of its relationship with the Jewish people, stating that the dialogue, as "the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, a dialogue between the first and second part of its Bible" (Pope John Paul II, Mainz, November 17, 1980).

Suffice it to say, neither Nostra Aetate nor Dei verbum reject the idea that the Sinai covenant (the Mosaic covenant) was superseded, which, as we proceed in our analysis, even the 2015 Commission admits is absent from Nostra Aetate. Additionally, I know of no official Catholic document that cites Dei verbum in this regard, nor do I know of any statement in Dei verbum that teaches the Mosaic covenant continues for the Jews or has not been superseded.5

We will also see that, identical to the USCCB’s 1988 paper, the 2015 Commission, late in this paper, will attempt to use John Paul II’s lone statement made in a 1980 speech in Mainz, Germany to a Jewish audience, “the Old Covenant, never revoked by God,” to support the idea that some unspecified covenant exclusively between God and Israel remains in place. We will show, however, that not only is there no precedent for interpreting John Paul II’s words in such a manner, the pope did not, in fact, have the Mosaic covenant, or any covenant exclusive to Israel, in mind.

The Commission: PREFACE

Fifty years ago, the declaration Nostra aetate of the Second Vatican Council was promulgated. Its fourth article presents the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people in a new theological framework. The following reflections aim at looking back with gratitude on all that has been achieved over the last decades in the Jewish–Catholic relationship, providing at the same time a new stimulus for the future. Stressing once again the unique status of this relationship within the wider ambit of interreligious dialogue, theological questions are further discussed, such as the relevance of revelation, the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant, the relationship between the universality of salvation in Jesus

Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).” The only time Dei verbum refers to the Mosaic covenant is to affirm that it once existed: “First He entered into a covenant with Abraham (see Gen. 15:18) and, through Moses, with the people of Israel (see Ex. 24:8),” and “The principal purpose to which the plan of the old covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming of Christ, the redeemer of all and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy (see Luke 24:44; John 5:39; 1 Peter 1:10), and to indicate its meaning through various types (see 1 Cor. 10:12),” (cited in ¶¶ 14, 15 of Dei verbum). See Appendix 1 for more information on the USCCB’s 1988 document.

5 In fact, Dei verbum 4 says the following, implying that all other covenants have ended and thus have been superseded by the New Covenant: “The
Christ and the affirmation that the covenant of God with Israel has never been revoked, and the Church’s mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism.

**R. Sungenis:** We note first the Commission’s bold and unqualified statement, “the covenant of God with Israel has never been revoked,” which will be repeated in various forms more than a half-dozen times in the document and, more or less, becomes its main theme or foundation. The first problem with such an unqualified statement is that the document never defines or clarifies what its understanding of the “Covenant” is. Unlike the 2006 United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, which specifically asserted the “covenant through Moses” as being valid for the Jews today, the terms in the Commission’s document are consistently ambiguous.

We will also see the same equivocation in the Commission’s use of terms such as “Israel,” “the Jews,” and even the word “revoked.” Rest assured, however, that although the Commission’s document is often ambiguous in its terminology and reasoning, it is not so equivocal in its bold and novel conclusions. In effect, the Commission will reach conclusions that are not substantiated by its terminology or reasoning.

**The Commission:** This document presents Catholic reflections on these questions, placing them in a theological context, in order that their significance may be deepened for members of both faith traditions. The text is not a magisterial document or doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church, but is a reflection prepared by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews on current theological questions that have developed since the Second Vatican Council. It is intended to be a starting point for further theological thought with a view to enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish–Catholic dialogue.

**R. Sungenis:** The Commission thus places its disclaimer early in the document so that no one will misunderstand it for an official Catholic teaching. I applaud the Commission for doing so.

1. A brief history of the impact of “Nostra aetate” (No. 4) over the last 50 years

**The Commission:** 1. “Nostra aetate” (No. 4) is rightly counted among those documents of the Second Vatican Council which have been able to effect, in a particularly striking manner, a new direction of the Catholic Church since then. This shift in the relations of the Church with the Jewish people and Judaism becomes apparent only when we recall that there were previously great reservations on both sides, in part because the history of Christianity has been seen to be discriminatory against Jews, even including attempts at forced conversion (cf. “Evangelii gaudium”, 248). The background of this complex connection consists inter alia in an asymmetrical relationship: as a minority the Jews were often confronted by and dependent upon a Christian majority. The dark and terrible shadow of the Shoah over Europe during the Nazi period led the Church to reflect anew on her bond with the Jewish people.

**R. Sungenis:** Whether it was Nostra aetate itself or a biased interpretation of Nostra aetate that effected a change in Catholic/Jewish relations, remains to be seen. I am of the opinion that Nostra aetate itself was quite innocuous, but what was read into it by prejudiced parties fomented sweeping changes in the Church’s thinking. As the Commission itself admits in paragraph 39:

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6 For example, see my responses to “Commission 38” on page 49. What was read into Nostra aetate may have been what previous drafts contained. After Leon de Poncins wrote his pamphlet Le Problème Juif face au Concile (“The Jewish Problem Facing the Council”) to alert the hierarchy to the Jewish influence on the Council, Paul VI vetoed the original
Because it was such a theological breakthrough, the Conciliar text is not infrequently over-interpreted, and things are read into it which it does not in fact contain.

Ironically, this is precisely what the Commission does in some of its handling of *Nostra aetate* – “over-interpret” and “read into.” The same is true of the previous Catholic/Jewish documents cited in the Commission’s paper which use *Nostra aetate* as their authority. It is quite easy to see that all of them were heavily influenced by the novel interpretation of Scripture and history that became popular prior to Vatican II; and all were authored by those espousing leftist or liberal views of Catholic doctrine and practice.

A good example of such changes in Catholic thinking are those spawned by the French Jewish historian, Jules Isaac (1877-1963), when his book *Jesus and Israel* was published in 1947. Isaac introduced a totally novel interpretation of the New Testament. Suffice it to say, his interpretation put the Jews in the best light possible and the Catholic Church’s doctrine and treatment of the Jews in the worst light possible. *See Appendix 1 for the full story.*

**The Commission:** 2. The fundamental esteem for Judaism expressed in “*Nostra aetate*” (No. 4) however has enabled communities that once faced one another with scepticism to become – step by step over the years – reliable partners and even good friends, capable of weathering crises together and negotiating conflicts positively. Therefore, the fourth article of “*Nostra aetate*” is recognised as the solid foundation for improving the relationship between Catholics and Jews.

**R. Sungenis:** Although *Nostra aetate* is more or less idolized by the Commission, not once does it analyze the document in detail or show where it is explicitly different than previous Catholic teaching on the Jews. Consequently, *Nostra aetate* becomes little more than an iconic symbol around which all ecumenical dialogue is enshrined but which few, if any, have actually proven the novel interpretations they have produced from it.

**The Commission:** 3. For the practical implementation of *Nostra aetate* (No. 4), Pope Paul VI on 22 October 1974 established the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews which, although organisationally attached to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, is operationally independent and entrusted with the task of accompanying and fostering religious dialogue with Judaism. From a theological perspective it also makes good sense to link this Commission with the Council for Promoting Christian Unity, since the separation between Synagogue and Church may be viewed as the first and most far-reaching breach among the chosen people.

**R. Sungenis:** Here we see the Commission inject the term “chosen people” as the accepted title for modern Jewry. The fact is, however, there exists no official teaching of the Church that recognizes the Jews as the “chosen people,” except as a reference to what they were understood to be in the Old Testament.

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7 For example, the December 1974 document, “Guidelines and Suggestions for the Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra aetate (No. 4)”; the June 185 document, “Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church”; the March 1998 document by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and finally the May 2001 document by the PBC titled, “The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible.”
The Commission: 4. Within a year of its foundation, the Holy See’s Commission published its first official document on 1 December 1974, with the title “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra aetate (No. 4)”. The crucial and new concern of this document consists in becoming acquainted with Judaism as it defines itself, giving expression to the high esteem in which Christianity holds Judaism and stressing the great significance for the Catholic Church of dialogue with the Jews, as stated in the words of the document: “On the practical level in particular, Christians must therefore strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism: they must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience” (Preamble). On the basis of the Church’s witness of faith in Jesus Christ, the document reflects upon the specific nature of the Church’s dialogue with Judaism. Reference is made in the text to the roots of Christian liturgy in its Jewish matrix, new possibilities are outlined for rapprochement in the spheres of teaching, education and training, and finally suggestions are made for joint social action.

R. Sungenis: It goes without saying that it is good to know one’s opposition if one desires to make a truce or a friendship. Hence, dialogue with the Jews without knowing how the Jews or Judaism “defines itself” would certainly be a fruitless endeavor. The problem, as we will see, is that the Commission repeatedly fails to make the right decision from what it acknowledges as the definition that Jews and Judaism uses for themselves.

The Commission: 5. Eleven years later on 24 June 1985, the Holy See’s Commission issued a second document entitled “Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church”. This document has a stronger theological - exegetical orientation insofar as it reflects on the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, delineates the Jewish roots of the Christian faith, explicates the manner in which ‘the Jews’ are represented in the New Testament, points out commonalities in liturgy, above all in the great festivals of the church year, and briefly focuses on the relationship of Judaism and Christianity in history.

R. Sungenis: The statement in the “Notes” saying it, “explicates the manner in which ‘the Jews’ are represented in the New Testament,” is important for us to take notice, since the tendency among the more liberal factions in the Catholic Church for the decades following Vatican II has been to accuse the New Testament of containing “anti-semitic” remarks. The Gospel of John is the most accused, followed by the Gospel of Matthew. Likewise, the Church Fathers, especially Chrysostom and Augustine, are often vilified by modern authors as being anti-semitic. Curiously, few such accusations ever appeared in Jewish literature until Jules Isaac introduced the concept of an “anti-semitic New Testament” in the 1940s. See Appendix 1 for more information on this issue.

Liberal Catholics point to the historical-critical theory which asserts that first or second generation Christians, who allegedly became anti-semitic after the crucial break between the Gentile and Jewish factions in the first century (see Acts 13:43-48), redacted the original Gospel writings and filled them with prejudicial statements against the Jews. Other liberals say that the Evangelists themselves, as well as Paul, were already anti-semitic due to the teachings of Jesus against the Pharisees and Sadducees. Further exacerbating the problem is that these accusations against the New Testament are made in a modern political climate that is void of a specific definition for anti-semitism. Nevertheless, today the popular and ‘politically correct’ understanding of anti-semitism seems to be any and all criticism levied against Jews, Judaism, Israel or Zionism, with little attention paid to the moral and ethical aspects of the question.
The Commission: With regard to the “land of the forefathers” the document emphasizes: “Christians are invited to understand this religious attachment which finds its roots in Biblical tradition, without however making their own any particular religious interpretation of this relationship. ... 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.” The permanence of Israel is however to be perceived as an “historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design” (VI, 1).

R. Sungenis: The Commission should be given credit for its separation of the political state of Israel and the spiritual status of Judaism, since many “Christian Zionists” today see little difference between the two. Christian Zionism sees the state of Israel as ordained by Old Testament prophecy and as the key element in God’s fulfillment of eschatology (e.g., Dispensationalism, Premillennialism, Chiliasm). However, the Commission’s statement that national Israel is a “sign to be interpreted within God’s design,” is a special pleading and superfluous, since nothing that happens in the world escapes “God’s design.” To be in “God’s design” does not mean, for example, that the modern state of Israel was prophesied in the Old Testament. Rather, modern Israel, as the Commission itself suggests, is the result of “the common principles of international law” (e.g., the 1948 United Nations charter that entitled Israel to a portion of land in Palestine for political reasons, not religious reasons).

The Commission: 6. A third document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews was presented to the public on 16 March 1998. It deals with the Shoah under the title “We remember. A reflection on the Shoah”. This text delivers the harsh but accurate judgement that the balance of the 2000–year relationship between Jews and Christians is regrettably negative. It recalls the attitude of Christians towards the anti-Semitism of the National Socialists and focuses on the duty of Christians to remember the human catastrophe of the Shoah. In a letter at the beginning of this declaration Saint Pope John Paul II expresses his hope that this document will truly “help to heal the wounds of past misunderstandings and injustices. May it enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible.”

R. Sungenis: The premise of such statements is that the Shoah is, or nearly is, an exclusively Jewish catastrophe; and by the process of elimination, the Gentiles must then be designated as evil perpetrators against the Jews. The fact is, however, that there were more Gentiles incarcerated and slaughtered by the Third Reich than Jews. Christians, especially Catholics, were targeted by Hitler just as much as the Jews. We should also be aware of the fact that, if the German concentration camps were a Shoah for the Jews, certainly the Russian camps were a Shoah for Christians. At the Gulag, for example, estimates as high as 20 million deaths were perpetrated on Christians by Russian commissars who were predominately of Jewish origin. As such, the Jews certainly do not have a monopoly on suffering, but it seems that the Commission, as well as all previous Catholic/Jewish “dialogues,” elevate Jewish suffering and at the same time minimize Christian suffering.

We must also keep in mind that Europe during the turn of the 20th century was overrun by the liberal theology coming out of Germany, France, and England. This was a theology that denied the basic tenets of the Christian faith, such as the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture; the existence of hell; the resurrection of the human body; the second coming of Christ and the virgin birth of Christ. This theology began to seep heavily into Catholicism in the early 20th century and still permeates much of Catholicism today, including Catholic seminaries and universities. Since this liberal theology had an
aversion to the miraculous, it denied heaven’s warning given at Fatima in 1917 that World War II would come upon the world unless Russia – the very country that was taken over by the Jewish Bolsheviks in 1917 – was consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and converted. Instead, Catholic liberals, led by Edward Dhanis, S.J., castigated Sister Lucia (the surviving Fatima visionary) as a deluded child. In light of all these facts, it is easy to see that World War II was, as Our Lady said, a judgment from heaven for the world’s sins. Hence, the judgment was not focused on the Jews, but mainly on the liberal Christian churches of Europe who were leading its members into apostasy, and still do today. Today attendance by Catholics to receive the sacraments in countries such as France, Germany and England is now below 15%.

The Commission: 7. In the series of documents issued by the Holy See, reference must be made to the text published by the Pontifical Biblical Commission on 24 May 2001, which deals explicitly with Jewish-Catholic dialogue: “The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”. This represents the most significant exegetical and theological document of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue and is a treasure-trove of common issues which have their basis in the Scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. The Sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people are considered a “fundamental component of the Christian Bible”, the fundamental themes of the Holy Scripture of the Jewish people and their adoption into the faith in Christ are discussed, and the manner in which Jews are represented in the New Testament is illustrated in detail.

R. Sungenis: The Commission consistently refers to “the Sacred Scripture of the Jewish people” or “the Jewish Scriptures,” and other such similar terms. The fact is, however, that since the Jewish religion described in the Old Testament does not exist today (i.e., there is no temple cult; no priestly line; no prophetic line; no genealogical line; no kingly line, etc.), modern Judaism has little to do with the “Scriptures.” This is especially true in light of the fact that the centerpiece of the Old Testament was the prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ, which modern Judaism not only denies but repudiates. Further, the New Testament explains that the Old Testament is to be preserved and interpreted exclusively by the New Testament church, and it is that Church which now possesses the “temple” and the “priestly, prophetic and kingly” line, all of which are wrapped up in Jesus Christ. Modern Judaism certainly tries its best to reproduce at least some vestige of the Jewish religion of the Old Testament for the Jews who survive today, but this does not mean that the Old Testament is to be relegated as “the Sacred Scripture of the Jewish people.” Today, the Old Testament is the sole possession of the Christian church. Those Jews who wish to become members of the Christian church by baptism can share in that ownership, but the Jews at large have no ownership of any Scripture.

The Commission: 8. Texts and documents, as important as they are, cannot replace personal encounters and face-to-face dialogues. While under Blessed Pope Paul VI the first steps in Jewish-Catholic dialogue were undertaken, Saint Pope John Paul II succeeded in fostering and deepening this dialogue through compelling gestures towards the Jewish people. He was the first pope to visit the former concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau to pray for the victims of the Shoah, and he visited the Roman Synagogue to express his solidarity with the Jewish community. In the context of an historical pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he was also a guest of the state of Israel where he participated in interreligious encounters, paid a visit to both Chief Rabbis and prayed at the Western Wall. Again and again he met with Jewish groups, whether in the Vatican or during his numerous apostolic journeys. So too Benedict XVI, even before his election to the papacy, engaged in Jewish-Catholic dialogue by offering in a series of lectures important theological reflections on the relationship between the Old and the New
Covenant, and the Synagogue and the Church. Following his election and in the footsteps of Saint Pope John Paul II he fostered this dialogue in his own way by reinforcing the same gestures and giving expression to his esteem for Judaism through the power of his words. As Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was greatly committed to fostering Jewish-Catholic dialogue and had many friends among the Jews of Argentina. Now as Pope he continues, at the international level, to intensify dialogue with Judaism through many friendly encounters. One of his first such encounters was in May 2014 in Israel, where he met with the two Chief Rabbis, visited the Western Wall, and prayed for the victims of the Shoah in Yad Vashem.

**R. Sungenis:** Here again we see the same theme – the Shoah is being used as a sympathetic rallying point for the theological liberals who believe that all religions have spiritual rights and divine sanction, particularly modern Judaism. As such they have mistakenly elevated modern Judaism as something based on the Old Testament “Scriptures,” which are for the purpose of providing Judaism with spiritual rights that are intrinsic and independent of the Christian church. The fact is, Judaism is a man-made religion just the same as Islam or Buddhism. In fact, it is not only a man-made religion, it has the dubious distinction of not only rejecting Jesus Christ but reviling and repudiating him (e.g., the Babylonian Talmud of 600 AD claims that Jesus Christ is in hell being boiled in human excrement, and the Blessed Virgin Mary is a whore). At least Islam believes that Jesus Christ was a good man and a prophet, and the Koran extols Jesus Christ and Mary in several places.

**The Commission:** 9. Even before the establishment of the Holy See’s Commission, there were contacts and links with various Jewish organisations through the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Since Judaism is multi-faceted and not constituted as an organisational unity, the Catholic Church was faced with the challenge of determining with whom to engage, because it was not possible to conduct individual and independent bilateral dialogues with all Jewish groupings and organisations which had declared their readiness to dialogue. To resolve this problem the Jewish organisations took up the suggestion of the Catholic Church to establish a single organisation for this dialogue. The International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) is the official Jewish representative to the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

**R. Sungenis:** In other words, only those Jews who are liberal-minded, like the Catholic liberals, will be allowed to dialogue. Since there is a great divide between Reformed Judaism (which is liberal) and Orthodox Judaism (which is very conservative), the Orthodox Jews will hardly have a place at the “dialogue” since they are not conducive to either ecumenism or the new world order. In fact, if the wish of Catholic liberals to revive the Old Covenant for the Jews based on the “Jewish Scriptures” were to be accepted and put into practice by Orthodox Jews, then the Catholics should fear for their lives, since one of the prominent themes of the Old Testament is to put to death anyone who will not accept the theological doctrines and practices of ancient Judaism.

**The Commission:** 10. The IJCIC began its work in 1970, and a year later the first joint conference was organized in Paris. The conferences which have been conducted regularly since are the responsibility of the entity known as the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC), and they shape the collaboration between the IJCIC and the Holy See’s Commission. In February 2011, once more in Paris, the ILC was able to look back with gratitude on 40 years of institutional dialogue. Much has developed over the past 40 years; the former confrontation has turned into successful cooperation, the previous potential for conflict has become positive conflict.
management, and the past co-existence marked by tension has been replaced by resilient and fruitful mutuality. The bonds of friendship forged in the meantime have proved to be stable, so that it has become possible to address even controversial subjects together without the danger of permanent damage being done to the dialogue. This was all the more necessary because over the past decades the dialogue had not always been free of tensions. In general, however, one can observe with appreciation that in Jewish-Catholic dialogue since the new millennium above all, intensive efforts have been made to deal openly and positively with any arising differences of opinion and conflicts, in such a way that mutual relations have become stronger.

R. Sungenis: There is certainly nothing wrong with the Catholic Church holding dialogues with the Jews and those who follow Judaism. The problem is that the kind of dialogues enjoined by Catholic liberals is not the kind that seeks to gently persuade his Jewish counterpart about the joys and benefits of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. That kind of “dialogue” is totally off-limits. Liberals simply will not allow any hint of “converting” someone away from another religion. It would spoil the very reason for their liberalism – freedom of religion. They also realize that any such “conversion” talk will stop the Catholic/Jewish dialogue its tracks. This will result in the Jews, and their deep pockets, refusing to have any cooperation with the Church in the all-important social issues that are common to both parties. Essentially, the gospel that is propagated today by Catholic liberals is a social gospel, the same as it is for the Protestant liberals (and as a result both are seeing their churches emptied to the bone). It minimizes creeds and doctrines (since they are deemed “divisive”) and maximizes social causes (e.g., feeding the poor, climate change, etc.). The liberals have so diluted the Christian faith of its former doctrines (e.g., salvation only to those who accept Jesus Christ) and morals (e.g., accepting the homosexual lifestyle as worthy of salvation) that they have few, if any, barriers to accepting other religions as recipients of salvation. In fact, most liberals believe that the whole world is either already saved or will be saved. Of course, the liberals believe that those who don’t accept their social gospel are close-minded religionists who are only interested in doctrine but have no love for humanity. This battle has been going on ever since the 1700s when the Protestant Reformation developed into Post-reformation liberalism. It then seeped into the Catholic Church in the mid-1800s and became full-blown in the 1940s, leading to Vatican II in the 1960s and its present modern aftermath. In fact, the Catholic liberals did in 50 years what it took the Protestant liberals to do in 300 years.

The Commission: 11. Beside the dialogue with the IJCIC we should also mention the institutional conversation with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, which is clearly to be seen as a fruit of the encounter of Saint Pope John Paul II with both Chief Rabbis in Jerusalem during his visit to Israel in March 2000. The first meeting was organised in June 2002 in Jerusalem, and since then such meetings have been conducted annually, taking place in Rome and Jerusalem alternately. The two delegations are relatively small so that a very personal and intensive discussion on various subjects is possible, such as on the sanctity of life, the status of the family, the significance of the Sacred Scriptures for life in society, religious freedom, the ethical foundations of human behaviour, the ecological challenge, the relationship of secular and religious authority and the essential qualities of religious leadership in secular society. The fact that the Catholic representatives taking part in the meetings are bishops and priests and the Jewish representatives almost exclusively rabbis permits individual topics to be examined from a religious perspective as well. The dialogue with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has to that extent enabled more open relations between Orthodox Judaism and the Catholic Church at a global level. After each
meeting a joint declaration is published which in each instance has testified to the richness of the common spiritual heritage of Judaism and Christianity and to what valuable treasures are still to be unearthed. In reviewing over more than ten years of dialogue we can gratefully affirm that a strong friendship has resulted which represents a firm foundation for the future.

**R. Sungenis:*** Yes, we must agree that “a strong friendship has resulted which represents a firm foundation for the future,” as long as the Catholic side does not tell the Jewish side that it must repent of its sins, be baptized, and accept Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior. In other words, the Catholic side has decided not to do what Peter did for the Jews when he told them they were responsible for the death of Christ and that in order to receive God’s mercy for such a heinous act they must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-28). In other words, the Catholic liberals of today have completely lost sight of what the Gospel is. They are much more interested in shaking hands and being nice to everyone so that they can convince themselves that they are preaching the Gospel by social action.

**The Commission:*** 12. The efforts of the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews cannot of course be restricted to these two institutional dialogues. The Commission aims in fact at being open to all streams within Judaism and at maintaining contact with all Jewish groupings and organisations that wish to establish links with the Holy See. The Jewish side shows a particular interest in audiences with the Pope, which are in every instance prepared by the Commission. Besides direct contacts with Judaism the Holy See’s Commission also strives to provide opportunities within the Catholic Church for dialogue with Judaism and to work together with individual Bishops’ Conferences to support them locally in promoting Jewish-Catholic dialogue. The introduction of the ‘Day of Judaism’ in some European countries is a good example of this.

**R. Sungenis:*** As George Orwell once said, “We have now sunk to a depth at which restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men.” Or, as St. Clement of Alexandria said, “When lies have been accepted for some time, the truth always astounds with an air of novelty.” For the Catholic Church to promote a “Day of Judaism” means it is promoting a religion that denies and repudiates the very core of the Christian faith, namely, Jesus Christ. Let’s be clear. Judaism thoroughly and completely rejects Jesus Christ. But since the Catholic Church’s liberalism has sunk to depths in which, as Isaiah the prophet once warned to the apostate of his day, “right is wrong and wrong is right,” we must restate the obvious – Judaism rejects Jesus Christ and is thus anti-Christ or anti-Christian. Judaism is not the friend of the Christian faith. It is its most bitter and vociferous antagonist, no matter how inviting its political, monetary or social gestures may be. History shows that the only reason that members of Judaism want to have an “audience with the Pope” is to influence him to accept Judaism as a viable religion on par with Christianity, and so far they are succeeding and the popes are being deceived (See Appendix 1 for more information on this phenomenon).

**The Commission:*** 13. Over the past decades both the ‘dialogue ad extra’ and the ‘dialogue ad intra’ have led with increasing clarity to the awareness that Christians and Jews are irrevocably inter-dependent, and that the dialogue between the two is not a matter of choice but of duty as far as theology is concerned. Jews and Christians can enrich one another in mutual friendship. Without her Jewish roots the Church would be in danger of losing its soteriological anchoring in salvation history and would slide into an ultimately unhistorical Gnosis.

**R. Sungenis:*** It is certainly true that “without her Jewish roots the Church would be in danger of losing its soteriological anchoring in salvation history and would slide into an ultimately unhistorical Gnosis.” In fact, we
can go a step further and state unequivocally that without her Jewish roots the Church would not exist. The problem, however, is that modern-day Judaism does not represent the "Jewish roots" from which the Church has its soteriological anchoring. Modern-day Judaism is a hydra, not a root. In fact, modern-day Judaism rejects its own "Jewish roots"; or, rather, picks and chooses what "roots" it will accept, favoring the ceremonial trappings over the theological substance – a substance whose foundation is Jesus Christ.

The Commission: Pope Francis states that "while it is true that certain Christian beliefs are unacceptable to Judaism, and that the Church cannot refrain from proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah, there exists as well a rich complementarity which allows us to read the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures together and to help one another to mine the riches of God’s word. We can also share many ethical convictions and a common concern for justice and the development of peoples" ("Evangelii gaudium", 249).

R. Sungenis: In physics, what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? – The same that happens when a religion that has Jesus Christ at its core meets a religion that, at its core, rejects Jesus Christ. The irresistible force will break apart and the immovable object will bend. In other words, both will be compromised. Both parties will then dress up the compromise as a "rich complementarity which allows us...to mine the riches of God’s word," and they will limit the product of their mutual research to "ethical convictions and a common concern for justice and development of peoples." In other words, they can pretend that their mutual earthly endeavors will be judged by God as sufficient for their mutual heavenly reward, even though their research has been irreparably tainted by a rejection of its main interpretive guide – Jesus Christ. Instead of the Christian side taking its model from St. Paul and seeking to convince the Jewish side that the "Hebrew Scriptures" focus on the very individual (Jesus Christ) that the Jewish side has rejected, the modern Catholic Church has decided that the “conversion” approach is obsolete and even harmful since various Jewish authors claim that it is “anti-semitic” and consequently ends up producing catastrophes like the Shoah.

2. The special theological status of Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

The Commission: 14. The dialogue with Judaism is for Christians something quite special, since Christianity possesses Jewish roots which determine relations between the two in a unique way (cf. "Evangelii gaudium", 247). In spite of the historical breach and the painful conflicts arising from it, the Church remains conscious of its enduring continuity with Israel.

R. Sungenis: Notice how the Commission has juxtaposed the terms “dialogue with Judaism” and "enduring continuity with Israel." Previously in #5 the Commission stated: "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." So if Israel is only a political entity and not "itself religious," then how can the Church have an “enduring continuity with Israel”? Other than the present nation-state of Israel, “Israel” does not exist, so there is no other Israel with which the Church has an “enduring continuity.” Unfortunately, the modern state of Israel continues to do the same thing it did when it was a nation-state in the first century—deny Jesus Christ as its Lord and Savior—the very reason that Pope Pius X denied to Theodore Herzl any blessing in having the Jews go back to Israel.8

8 Pius X stated to Herzl: “We cannot give approval to this movement. We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem—but we could never sanction it. The soil of Jerusalem, if it was not always sacred, has been sanctified by the life of Jesus Christ. As the head of the Church I cannot tell you anything
The Commission: Judaism is not to be considered simply as another religion; the Jews are instead our “elder brothers” (Saint Pope John Paul II), our “fathers in faith” (Benedict XVI). Jesus was a Jew, was at home in the Jewish tradition of his time, and was decisively shaped by this religious milieu (cf. “Ecclesia in Medio Oriente”, 20). His first disciples gathered around him had the same heritage and were defined by the same Jewish tradition in their everyday life. In his unique relationship with his heavenly Father, Jesus was intent above all on proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom of God. “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15).

R. Sungenis: The Old Testament Jews were certainly our “elder brothers” and “fathers in the faith.” One only has to read the long list of the Jewish heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 to know that the Jews of old believed in God long before the Christian church was established. But again, the problem with such religious references is that they fail to distinguish the divine religion of the Jews in the Old Testament from the modern-day Judaism that essentially rejects the Jewish religion of the Old Testament. Abraham looked forward to Christ (John 8:56). Moses looked forward to Christ (Hebrews 11:26). David looked forward to Christ (Acts 2:25). The Jews of today neither look forward to Christ nor backward to Christ. Even the “Messiah” that the Orthodox Jews wait for is not Jesus Christ but some other messianic personage, for they have rejected Jesus Christ, born of David and Mary, as the true Messiah.

Hence, those who call themselves “Jews” today are not our “elder brothers” or our “fathers in the faith.” They are imposters who have created their own religion that is camouflaged to look like the legitimate religion of the Old Testament Jews, especially in dialogue with Catholics.

The Commission: Within Judaism there were many very different kinds of ideas regarding how the kingdom of God would be realised, and yet Jesus’ central message on the Kingdom of God is in accordance with some Jewish thinking of his day. One cannot understand Jesus’ teaching or that of his disciples without situating it within the Jewish horizon in the context of the living tradition of Israel; one would understand his teachings even less so if they were seen in opposition to this tradition. In Jesus not a few Jews of his time saw the coming of a ‘new Moses’, the promised Christ (Messiah). But his coming nevertheless provoked a drama with consequences still felt today. Fully and completely human, a Jew of his time, descendant of Abraham, son of David, shaped by the whole tradition of Israel, heir of the prophets, Jesus stands in continuity with his people and its history. On the other hand he is, in the light of the Christian faith, himself God – the Son – and he transcends time, history, and every earthly reality. The community of those who believe in him confesses his divinity (cf. Phil 2:6-11). In this sense he is perceived to be in discontinuity with the history that prepared his coming. From the perspective of the Christian faith, he fulfils the mission and expectation of Israel in a perfect way. At the same time, however, he overcomes and transcends them in an eschatological manner. Herein consists the fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity, that is, how the figure of Jesus is to be evaluated. Jews are able to see Jesus as belonging to their people, a Jewish teacher who felt himself called in a particular way to preach the Kingdom of God. That this Kingdom of God has come with himself as God’s representative is beyond the horizon of Jewish expectation. The conflict between
Jesus and the Jewish authorities of his time is ultimately not a matter of an individual transgression of the law, but of Jesus’ claim to be acting with divine authority. The figure of Jesus thus is and remains for Jews the 'stumbling block', the central and neuralgic point in Jewish-Catholic dialogue. From a theological perspective, Christians need to refer to the Judaism of Jesus’ time and to a degree also the Judaism that developed from it over the ages for their own self-understanding. Given Jesus’ Jewish origins, coming to terms with Judaism in one way or another is indispensable for Christians. Yet, the history of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity has also been mutually influenced over time.

**R. Sungenis:** After reading the above paragraph I can certainly conclude that I would not want the job of the Vatican editor who has the unenviable job of trying to mix the oil of Christianity with the water of modern-day Judaism. The mental gymnastics that this author had to go through in order to find some happy medium to make both the Catholic and Jewish sides comfortable is a wonder in itself. As usually happens in such cases, we will see the author first supporting the Catholic side; then supporting the Jewish side; and then trying to find the right words to make the differing sides balance, but never quite finding an ideal description since, as he very well knows before he starts, there is no such ideal balance. The only balance possible is compromise from one or both sides. As we will see, the Catholic side compromises by regarding modern-day Judaism as a viable religion that should not have the Christian Gospel preached to it so as to avoid anti-semitism and future Shoahs; and the Jewish side compromises by, well, allowing the Catholics to compromise so that it can have Jewish cooperation (i.e., Jewish money) in its all-important social causes.

**The Commission:** 15. Dialogue between Jews and Christians then can only be termed ‘interreligious dialogue’ by analogy, that is, dialogue between two intrinsically separate and different religions. It is not the case that two fundamentally diverse religions confront one another after having developed independently of one another or without mutual influence. The soil that nurtured both Jews and Christians is the Judaism of Jesus’ time, which not only brought forth Christianity but also, after the destruction of the temple in the year 70, post-biblical rabbinical Judaism which then had to do without the sacrificial cult and, in its further development, had to depend exclusively on prayer and the interpretation of both written and oral divine revelation. Thus Jews and Christians have the same mother and can be seen, as it were, as two siblings who – as is the normal course of events for siblings – have developed in different directions.

**R. Sungenis:** One of the secrets to mixing oil and water is not to use the analogy of mixing oil and water since everyone knows that oil and water do not mix. It is better to use analogies such as “two siblings who have developed in different directions,” thus giving the impression that both sides have legitimacy to exist and it is just a matter of tolerating one another. Thus Catholic liberals must create a Jewish “sibling” with whom they can dialogue who seems every bit as legitimate as their Old Testament Jewish forebears. This is accomplished by convincing the reader that the “post-biblical rabbinical Judaism which then had to do without the sacrificial cult and, in its further development, had to depend exclusively on prayer and the interpretation of both written and oral divine revelation,” was a legitimate extension of “the Judaism of Jesus’ time.” But he does so without the slightest theological proof or conciliar or patristic witness. Once the reader accepts that there is no distinction between “the Judaism of Jesus’ time” and “post-biblical rabbinical Judaism,” the stage is set to make the grandiose conclusion that “Jews and Christians have the same mother.” Here is the reality, however: although Abraham, Moses and David have the same “mother” as Christians since they all believe they have the same “brother,” namely, Jesus Christ, modern-
day Jews, since they reject Jesus Christ—and thus reject Abraham, Moses and David—do not have the same mother as Christians. As noted previously, “post-biblical rabbinical Judaism,” as represented in the Babylonian Talmud, calls the “mother” of Christianity a “whore.” Hence, if the author insists on using the analogy of brothers from the same mother to describe the relationship of Christianity and Judaism, then the only proper analogy is the one that Scripture itself uses, namely, that of Jacob and Esau. Jacob would represent Christianity; and Esau would represent “post-biblical rabbinical Judaism” that rejected God (cf. Romans 9–11; Hebrews 11:16–17).

The Commission: The Scriptures of ancient Israel constitute an integral part of the Scriptures of both Judaism and Christianity, understood by both as the word of God, revelation, and salvation history.

R. Sungenis: Again, we must interject that modern-day Judaism is not a religion of the Old Testament. It is a hybrid of theology and philosophy that picks and chooses from the Old Testament that which best fits with its modern religious ideals. Consequently, it has a distorted image of God, revelation and salvation, and is in need of a total reeducation by the Christian Church. Unfortunately, under pressure from modern-day Judaism, the modern-day Church has decided to forego such reeducation. It has decided to create a hybrid “Judeo-Christian” religion that accepts Judaism as a God-fearing, God-obeying, God-endearing entity to the point that Judaism has no need of the Christian Gospel and, in fact, will fare much better without it since it will now face no threat of anti-semitism and future Shoahs.

The Commission: The first Christians were Jews; as a matter of course they gathered as part of the community in the Synagogue, they observed the dietary laws, the Sabbath and the requirement of circumcision, while at the same time confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah sent by God for the salvation of Israel and the entire human race.

R. Sungenis: The Commission’s above description of first century Christianity is distorted. Paul sometimes met the Jews in their synagogues but only to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to them, not for Christian worship (cf. Acts 13:14-15; 14:1; 17:1-2). Christian worship took place in “house” churches (cf. Rom. 16:5; 1Cor 16:19; Col. 4:15). As for circumcision, it was optional for the Christian (as noted in Acts 16:3 when Paul circumcised Timothy in order to make it easier for Timothy to evangelize the Jews), but circumcision was strictly forbidden for religious reasons, which Paul showed clearly when he refused to circumcise Titus (Gal. 2:3). The issue of circumcision was settled at the Council of Jerusalem around 50 AD (Acts 15), where it was decided that no one would be required to be circumcised for religious reasons. Dietary laws were also voluntary, but three were required for a time so as not to offend Jewish Christians needlessly (see Acts 15:29). Later, however, Paul began to remove this requirement from the churches (See 1 Corinthians 8 and 10).

The Commission: With Paul the ‘Jewish Jesus movement’ definitively opens up other horizons and transcends its purely Jewish origins. Gradually his concept came to prevail, that is, that a non-Jew did not have to become first a Jew in order to confess Christ. In the early years of the Church, therefore, there were the so-called Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, the ecclesia ex circumcisione and the ecclesia ex gentibus, one Church originating from Judaism, the other from the Gentiles, who however together constituted the one and only Church of Jesus Christ.

R. Sungenis: The point in fact is that the Church made the transition from a Jewish-accommodated Church to a totally non-Jewish-accommodated Church, which became the paradigm from the second century onward.
The Commission: The separation of the Church from the Synagogue does not take place abruptly however and, according to some recent insights, may not have been complete until well into the third or fourth centuries.

R. Sungenis: Since the Commission fails to footnote what "recent insights" it is referring to as its authority, its argument is unconvincing. I don't know of even one reputable or authoritative source that says Christianity was still connected to the synagogue "into the third or fourth centuries." Even if there were some Jewish remnants at such a late date, the strictures cited above for Jewish Christians were put in place early in the first century. Those who didn't abide by them centuries later were doing so without ecclesial authorization.

The Commission: This means that many Jewish Christians of the first period did not perceive any contradiction between living in accordance with some aspects of the Jewish tradition and yet confessing Jesus as the Christ. Only when the number of Gentile Christians represented the majority, and within the Jewish community the polemics regarding the figure of Jesus took on sharper contours, did a definitive separation appear to be no longer avoidable. Over time the siblings Christianity and Judaism increasingly grew apart, becoming hostile and even defaming one another.

R. Sungenis: Notice how the Commission tries to make a seamless garment between Jewish Christians who were still practicing "some aspects of the Jewish tradition" and "Judaism" of the "third or fourth centuries" that "grew apart" from Christianity. What the Commission fails to realize is that the "Judaism that grew apart" from Christianity was not composed of Jewish Christians who, against the Council of Jerusalem and St. Paul, insisted on keeping their Jewish tradition, but Jews who totally rejected Christianity in the first century and decided to go their own way.

This break between Christianity and Judaism is clearly demarcated in Acts 13:43-48, as St. Paul says:

43And when the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. 44The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered together to hear the word of God. 45But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with jealousy, and contradicted what was spoken by Paul, and reviled him. 46And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. 47For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth.'" 48And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of God; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

The Commission: For Christians, Jews were often represented as damned by God and blind since they were unable to recognize in Jesus the Messiah and bearer of salvation.

R. Sungenis: The Commission is acting as if this were completely wrong. The fact is, the New Testament teaches that the Jews at large have been hardened in their unbelief and there will be only a remnant that turn back to God. What else is a Christian to glean from St. Paul’s teaching in Romans 11:1-10 as an explanation for why a majority of Jews throughout the first century and beyond refused to bow the knee to Christ? Let’s read his words:

1I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an
Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 9 as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day.” 10 And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs for ever.”

The Commission: For Jews, Christians were often seen as heretics who no longer followed the path originally laid down by God but who went their own way. It is not without reason that in the Acts of the Apostles Christianity is called ‘the way’ (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22) in contrast to the Jewish Halacha which determined the interpretation of the law for practical conduct. Over time Judaism and Christianity became increasingly alienated from one another, even becoming involved in ruthless conflicts and accusing one another of abandoning the path prescribed by God.

R. Sungenis: Again, the Commission seems to be trying to say that all such conflict between Christianity and Judaism is wrong or abnormal, and that the Commission, after twenty centuries, now has a better way for Jews and Christians to relate to one another, which, in a nutshell, is for the Church to refrain from preaching the “stumbling block” (Jesus Christ) to the Jews since it might breed anti-semitism and future Shoahs. The fact is, the original conflict was caused by the Jews. The very book of Acts from which the Commission quotes is filled with story after story of the Jews chasing down Peter and Paul simply because they were preaching Jesus Christ. Neither Peter nor Paul started any conflicts with the Jews and they did not seek to kill the Jews, but the Jews sought to kill them. Unfortunately, the Commission seems bent on making the issue a competition between Jews and Christian rather than a matter of eternal truth versus eternal error.

The Commission: 17. On the part of many of the Church Fathers the so-called replacement theory or supersessionism steadily gained favour until in the Middle Ages it represented the standard theological foundation of the relationship with Judaism: the promises and commitments of God would no longer apply to Israel because it had not recognised Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, but had been transferred to the Church of Jesus Christ which was now the true ‘new Israel’, the new chosen people of God.

R. Sungenis: Notice by the use of the words “so-called” and “theory” how the Commission implies that supersessionism was not an official belief of the Christian church but was merely a majority-determined idea that gained favor by its own steam, as it were. The fact is, supersessionism (the doctrine that the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant) had a consensus in the patristic period and was formalized into Catholic doctrine in various councils of the Middle Ages, including the Councils of Florence and Trent.

The Commission: Arising from the same soil, Judaism and Christianity in the centuries after their separation became involved in a theological antagonism which was only to be defused at the Second Vatican Council.
R. Sungenis: Let us remember that the “theological antagonism” into which the Commission wishes to couch the controversy is none other than the fact that for twenty centuries prior to the Second Vatican Council the Jews at large refused to accept Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior. Hence, this “theological antagonism” could not have been “defused at the Second Vatican Council,” since the Jews continued their refusal to accept Christ during and after the Council.

The Commission: With its Declaration “Nostra aetate” (No. 4) the Church unequivocally professes, within a new theological framework, the Jewish roots of Christianity.

R. Sungenis: The Commission makes it appear as if “the Jewish roots of Christianity” is some new breakthrough discovered by Vatican II, but it is an old idea rooted in the writings of the Church Fathers and taught in Scripture. But one thing needs to be made clear; the “Jewish roots” are from the Old Testament, not from post-biblical rabbinical Judaism.

The Commission: While affirming salvation through an explicit or even implicit faith in Christ, the Church does not question the continued love of God for the chosen people of Israel.

R. Sungenis: Notice again how the Commission injects the phrase “chosen people,” as if Jews of today have the same spiritual status of an Abraham, a Moses, or a David. They do not. The Jews of today are adherents to an anti-biblical theology of their own making that has little to do with the “chosen people” of the Old Testament. The only “chosen people” among the Jews today are those Jews who have accepted Jesus Christ as the divine savior and have become members of the Church through baptism.

As for whether God has a continued love for the Jews, Scripture is clear in John 3:16 that “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life.”

Further, as St. Paul says in Rom. 11:28, “but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.” That is, due to God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God intends on electing some Jews to salvation (as Paul expresses earlier in Romans 11: 5-7, 14 and 23), and thus the love of God upon them is manifested. The $64,000 question, however, is who of the Jews will bend the knee and accept the savior of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which is none other than Jesus Christ?

The Commission: A replacement or supersession theology which sets against one another two separate entities, a Church of the Gentiles and the rejected Synagogue whose place it takes, is deprived of its foundations. From an originally close relationship between Judaism and Christianity a long-term state of tension had developed, which has been gradually transformed after the Second Vatican Council into a constructive dialogue relationship.

R. Sungenis: In reality, the Second Vatican Council did nothing to mitigate the “long-term state of tension” between Christianity and Judaism. How could it? The core problem, Jesus Christ, still remained and it wasn’t going to disappear by mere hand-waving. Rather, it was the liberals within the Church who hijacked the Council and made it appear to say things that it never said. As the Commission itself admits in paragraph 39: “Because it was such a theological breakthrough, the Conciliar text is not infrequently over-interpreted, and things are read into it which it does not in fact contain.”

This is precisely what happened, and the Commission is fulfilling its own prophecy. The only thing that changed is that there is now an appearance of change, and it was from this illusion of change that a so-called “dialogue” started. But after 50 years of talking, the stark reality is this: the dialogue has produced little more than doctrinal
compromises from the Catholic side (e.g., the Jews have their own covenant and do not need to have the Christian Gospel preached to them). But the side where major changes need to be made—the Jewish side—is where no changes have been made.

We also need to point out that the only tension the Commission has succeeded in creating is the one between itself and twenty centuries of Catholic teaching about the Jews; from which it is apparently wishing to extricate itself. Essentially, what the Commission is saying is that all the Church Fathers, all the medievals, all the saints, all the popes, all the doctors and all the theologians who insisted on separating from Jews who refused to accept Christ, but who continued to preach the Gospel to the Jews in hopes of saving them, were all wrong, and it is only those liberals (the very ones known for their heterodoxy in many other theological areas) who appeared during and after the Second Vatican Council that have seen the truth.

Let's be clear about this. In order to placate the Jews, the Commission has sacrificed twenty centuries of its own patrimony, somehow believing that the Church of yesteryear didn’t see things clearly and was, indeed, “anti-semitic.” This, of course, is totally absurd. The reality is, the Commission represents the successive stages of apostasy occurring within the modern Catholic Church today, an apostasy long prophesied by the very Fathers, medievals, popes, saints, doctors and theologians that the Commission castigates for their teaching on the Jews.

**The Commission:** 18. There have often been attempts to identify this replacement theory in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

**R. Sungenis:** That is because the epistle to the Hebrews has some of the strongest and clearest statements in Scripture regarding the fact that the Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant, which is the “supersession” of the Old Covenant. Let’s review these verses in detail:

**Hebrews 7:18:** “On the one hand, a former commandment is annull ed because of its weakness and uselessness”

**Hebrews 10:9:** “Then he says, ‘Behold, I come to do your will.’ He takes away the first [covenant] to establish the second [covenant]”

**Hebrews 8:7:** “For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another”

These clear statements in Hebrews are backed up by other clear statements in both Scripture and Tradition:

**2 Corinthians 3:14:** “For to this day when they [the Jews] read the Old Covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away”;

**Colossians 2:14:** “Having canceled the written code, with its decrees, that was against us and stood opposed to us; He took it away nailing it to the cross”;

**Pope Pius XII, Mystici Corporis, para. 29:** “…the New Testament took the place of the Old Law which had been abolished…but on the gibbet of His death Jesus made void the Law with its decrees fastened the handwriting of the Old Testament to the Cross.”

**Catechism of the Council of Trent:** “…the people, aware of the abrogation of the Mosaic Law…”

**Council of Florence:** “that the matter pertaining to the law of the Old Testament, of the Mosaic law…although they were suited to the divine worship
at that time, after our Lord’s coming had been signified by them, ceased, and the sacraments of the New Testament began”

**Council of Trent:** “but not even the Jews by the very letter of the law of Moses were able to be liberated or to rise therefrom”

**Cardinal Ratzinger:** “Thus the Sinai [Mosaic] Covenant is indeed superseded” (Many Religions – One Covenant, p. 70).

**St. John Chrysostom:** “Yet surely Paul’s object everywhere is to annul this Law….And with much reason; for it was through a fear and a horror of this that the Jews obstinately opposed grace” (Homily on Romans, 6:12); “And so while no one annuls a man’s covenant, the covenant of God after four hundred and thirty years is annulled; for if not that covenant but another instead of it bestows what is promised, then is it set aside, which is most unreasonable” (Homily on Galatians, Ch 3);

**St. Augustine:** “Instead of the grace of the law which has passed away, we have received the grace of the gospel which is abiding; and instead of the shadows and types of the old dispensation, the truth has come by Jesus Christ. Jeremiah also prophesied thus in God’s name: ‘Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah...’ Observe what the prophet says, not to Gentiles, who had not been partakers in any former covenant, but to the Jewish nation. He who has given them the law by Moses, promises in place of it the New Covenant of the gospel, that they might no longer live in the oldness of the letter, but in the newness of the spirit” (Letters, 74, 4);

**Justin Martyr:** Now, law placed against law has abrogated that which is before it, and a covenant which comes after in like manner has put an end to the previous one; and an eternal and final law – namely, Christ – has been given to us, and the covenant is trustworthy...Have you not read...by Jeremiah, concerning this same new covenant, He thus speaks: ‘Behold, the days come,’ says the Lord, ‘that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...’” (Dialogue with Trypho, Ch 11).

**The Commission:** This [Hebrew] Epistle, however, is not directed to the Jews but rather to the Christians of Jewish background who have become weary and uncertain. Its purpose is to strengthen their faith and to encourage them to persevere, by pointing to Christ Jesus as the true and ultimate high priest, the mediator of the new covenant.

**R. Sungenis:** It makes little difference to whom the Epistle is directed. The Hebrew writer simply makes indicative and factual statements regarding the status of the Old Covenant, namely, that it has been superseded by the New Covenant. These are timeless statements and independent of who the specific hearers might be. Instead of recognizing this fact the Commission is trying to make the absurd argument that since non-Christian Jews are not aware of or would not accept the Hebrew writer's arguments, this makes them immune from it. This only shows how desperate the Commission is to prove its point. On the one hand, the Commission admits it is forced to recognize that the Hebrew writer is saying the Old Covenant is superseded by the New, for to deny the obvious would be ample evidence that the Commission is totally inept at exegeting Scripture. On the other hand, if the Commission wants to appear logically
consistent to its audience, it must somehow extricate itself from the lynchpin of the “theological antagonism” it wishes to alleviate, namely, that caused by supersessionism. The solution, as we noted above, is to posit that Judaism is not bound by the facts that the Hebrew writer brings to the table because the Hebrew writer was not writing to unbelieving Jews, only to Christian Jews. But this would be like arguing that the Ten Commandments are only written for believers in God and that unbelievers are immune from its dictates and free of the guilt and punishment that accompanies transgression of them.

**The Commission:** This context is necessary to understand the Epistle’s contrast between the first purely earthly covenant and a second better (cf. Heb 8:7) and new covenant (cf. 9:15, 12:24). The first covenant is defined as outdated, in decline and doomed to obsolescence (cf. 8:13), while the second covenant is defined as everlasting (cf. 13:20). To establish the foundations of this contrast the Epistle refers to the promise of a new covenant in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah 31:31-34 (cf. Heb 8:8-12). This demonstrates that the Epistle to the Hebrews has no intention of proving the promises of the Old Covenant to be false, but on the contrary treats them as valid.

**R. Sungenis:** Of course, he would treat them as valid, not false. Why would the Hebrew writer accuse the Old Covenant of being false? That kind of argumentation would undermine his whole thesis, which is that the Old Covenant was true and valid but now has reached its point of fulfillment and is to be replaced by a new and better covenant, the New Covenant in Christ.

**The Commission:** The reference to the Old Testament promises is intended to help Christians to be sure of their salvation in Christ. At issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews is not the contrast of the Old and New Covenants as we understand them today, nor a contrast between the church and Judaism. Rather, the contrast is between the eternal heavenly priesthood of Christ and the transitory earthly priesthood. The fundamental issue in the Epistle to the Hebrews in the new situation is a Christological interpretation of the New Covenant.

**R. Sungenis:** The Commission is attempting to make the book of Hebrews into only one main issue so that it can then claim that the supporting or peripheral issues can be minimized or are not what they seem. It is clever, but it is wrong. Granted, one of the major themes of Hebrews concerns the eternal priesthood of Christ as opposed to the transitory priesthood on earth, but the fact remains that the eternal priesthood of Christ comes under the category of the “New Covenant” and the transitory priesthood on earth comes under the category of the “Old Covenant.” Since the earthly transitory priesthood no longer exists, then obviously the Old Covenant no longer exists. In other words, just as the earthly transitory priesthood has been superseded by the eternal heavenly priesthood of Christ, so the Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant. The logic is clear and there is no escape for the Commission.

**The Commission:** For exactly this reason, “*Nostra aetate*” (No. 4) did not refer to the Epistle to the Hebrews, but rather to Saint Paul’s reflections in his letter to the Romans 9–11.

**R. Sungenis:** In reality, the Commission cannot guess why *Nostra aetate* did not refer to the Epistle to the Hebrews. Perhaps the drafters of *Nostra aetate* thought it was so obvious that the New Covenant has superseded the Old that it wasn’t necessary to mention. Regardless, the Commission is trying to win the argument by implying there is a disagreement between what is said in Hebrews in contrast to what is said in Romans. The implication is that Romans says
the Covenant with the Jews is NOT superseded whereas Hebrews says it is (even if the Commission wants to keep its previous argument that Hebrews is only addressing Jewish Christians, not the Jews at large). This is precisely why the Commission has titled its document by quoting from Romans 11:29, namely, “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29),” which, to the Commission, apparently means that the Jewish Old Covenant is irrevocable. In other words, the Commission has chosen to settle the question of supersessionism by making it appear that Romans trump Hebrews and that Nostra aetate sided with Romans! I don’t think I’ve ever seen a more crass manipulation of both Scripture and conciliar documents in all my years. Not only has the Commission sacrificed its historical patrimony to placate modern Jewry, it has now made a mockery of Scripture by setting one book against another.

An Analysis of Romans 11:29

First, let’s take a close look at Romans 11:29. The first thing we notice is that it does not say “the Old Covenant is irrevocable.” If it did, it would certainly contradict Hebrews 7:18; 8:7-13 and 10:9. It says only that the “gifts and calling” are irrevocable. It does so first of all because Paul is reaffirming God’s integrity. If God says he is going to give a “gift” or make a “call,” he does not go back on his word. He keeps his promises. The Hebrew writer says something similar in Heb. 6:13-18:

13For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14saying, “Surely I will bless you and multiply you.” 15And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. 16Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 17So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, 18so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us.

The only remaining question regards what “gifts and call” St. Paul is referring to. That question can only be answered by the context, and the context starts several verses earlier when the question of whether the people of Israel are still permitted to have the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached to them and thereby become saved. The answer given by St. Paul is emphatically “Yes!” As such, the “gift” that is “irrevocable” for the Jews is the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. Likewise, the “call” that is “irrevocable” is the invitation to the Jews to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Why are they “irrevocable”? – because God promised them to Israel’s forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is precisely why Paul says in verse 27: “but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.” In other words, because of God’s promise to Abraham, the Jews of today can still become part of the elect. When one comes to Christ, he has been “elected.” Until the end of time the Jews will still have the “gift and call” to become elected, since God would never go back on the promise he made to their forefathers.

But this just begs the question: why would someone raise the issue of whether the Jews should still have the Gospel preached to them so that they can become saved? The reason is given in Romans chapters 9 and 10. There St. Paul speaks about how God rejected the nation of Israel because of its continual sins. He judged them as a nation several times, dispersing the 10 northern tribes in 722 BC and sending the two southern tribes into Babylonian captivity in 587 BC. Although the southern tribes returned in 517 BC, they become sinful again and were finally rejected at the cross in 33 AD and destroyed in 70 AD and 136 AD. In Acts 2-3, St. Peter lays the
blame for the death of Christ at the feet of the Jews. Although some repent, the Jewish leaders decide to antagonize the Church and, after being told again of their sinful past by Stephen, they make him the Church’s first martyr (Acts 7). They continue to persecute the Church throughout the book of Acts. At the end of Acts, St. Paul concludes the following about the Jews:

25"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: 26'Go to this people, and say, You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive. 27For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears they have closed; lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn for me to heal them.' 28Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."

So, if such ominous prophecies are made about the Jews and thus Paul decides to turn away from them and preach to the Gentiles, the question would naturally arise: can the Jews still be saved? As noted, Paul answers this question with an exuberant “Yes,” but it is a qualified Yes. The “yes” he gives is noted in Romans 11:1 when he himself raised the question of whether the Jew can still be saved. He says:

1I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? 3Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.” 4But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” 5So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

So, Paul’s answer to the question of whether the Jew can still be saved in spite of God’s punishment against national Israel and the revoking of its Old Covenant is a “Yes,” but a “Yes” that refers only to a remnant of Jews coming out of the nation, not the nation itself. The nation has been rejected and its covenant revoked. Its demise will come in 70 AD when the Romans destroy Jerusalem. But the Jews coming out of the nation and accepting the New Covenant in Jesus Christ will be saved, just as Paul himself was saved by accepting Jesus Christ. In fact, Paul says he is living proof that God has not rejected his people, since Paul was saved by personally meeting Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

The large majority of Jews who do not accept Christ will fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, just as Paul predicted in Acts 28:25-28, and which he reiterates in Romans 11:7-10:

7What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, 8as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear, down to this very day.” 9And David says, “Let their table become a snare and a trap, a pitfall and a retribution for them; 10let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.”

Hence, in regard to this ominous prophecy about the Jews, the question needs to be raised again: can the Jews still be saved? And if so, how will this happen? Paul answers this question in verses 11-14:

11So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.
Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

Notice that Paul says much the same as he did in verses 1-10. There he said that although the larger part of Israel would continue in their blindness, there will be a remnant that becomes saved. Similarly, in verses 11-14, he says that “some of them” will become saved and thus join the Gentiles. In this way, God fulfills his “irrevocable gifts and call” to the Jews that He promised to Abraham. Even though it is only a remnant that will respond to the “gifts and call,” the fact is that God has not taken away the possibility that ANY Jew can still be saved. Those who refuse to become saved do so of their own free will. In other words, God does not take the first step and blind the Jew so that it is impossible for him to repent and turn to Christ. Of his own free will the Jew decides to harden his heart and then God confirms that hardness.

The importance of the free will of the Jew to decide for Christ is restated in verses 22-23:

22Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off. 23And even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

Notice that Paul says of the Jews, “if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in.” Hence, whether the Jews will respond to the “gifts and call” of God is up to the Jew. If he repents and accepts Jesus Christ, God will graft him back into the olive tree, which olive tree is Christ.

Now that we know that a “remnant” or “some” of the Jews will turn to Christ and become saved like the Gentiles, St. Paul then goes on to show in verses 26-27 how, in regards to the “covenant,” this salvation will be accomplished by Christ.

26and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; 27and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.”

Notice that the saving of Israel is fulfilling at least two prophecies from the Old Testament. One is from Isaiah 59:20-21 concerning the “Deliverer” who will “banish ungodliness,” and the second is from Isaiah 27:9 concerning a “covenant with them” to “take away their sins.”

As we can see, the main theme is sin and its reparation. There is only one “Deliverer” who will “banish ungodliness from Jacob” and do so by making a “covenant with them” to “take away their sins.” It is Christ alone. There is no other savior. The “covenant” that He brings is the New Covenant as is stated clearly in Hebrews 8:10-12, and prophesied numerous times in the Old Testament:

10This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 11And they shall not teach everyone his fellow or everyone his brother, saying, ‘Know the

9 See Exodus 9:34-10:1 for an explanation of this dynamic between God’s hardening and man’s hardening.
Lord, for all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

Most important for this discussion is what the Hebrew writer says next in verse 13:

13 In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

So, in order to bring the “new covenant,” the “old covenant” had to be revoked (i.e., “vanish away”) because it was “obsolete.” Hence, the “covenant with them” that “takes away their sins” in Romans 11:27 can only be the “new covenant,” since it is the only covenant that can finally and eternally remit sins. The “old covenant” could only remit sins temporarily. Once the new covenant came and provided permanent forgiveness, there was no need for the old’s temporary forgiveness.

We can now see that Romans 11:29’s “irrevocable gifts and calling of God” is none other than the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. This is the same covenant that was given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the forefathers of Israel—and the covenant by which they also, as the remnant, became saved (Romans 4:1-22; Galatians 3:9-29; Luke 1:68-79).

It was “irrevocable” because, as we saw earlier from Hebrews 6:13-18, God “swore by an oath to Abraham” to provide salvation to those Jews who followed in the faith and works of Abraham.

But we also find that this New Covenant was not exclusively for the Jews. In fact, it was originally made for the Gentiles (Genesis 12:1-3). The Jews were added twenty-five years later (see Genesis 17). St. Paul teaches this in Galatians 3:6-8:

6 Thus Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

7 So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

So, we can conclude that the Gentiles who believe in Christ (which Paul says in Romans 11:25 are the “full number of the Gentiles”) and the “remnant” or “some” of Israel who believe in Christ (which Paul says in Romans 11:26 are “all Israel”), will together, under the New Covenant made for both Jew and Gentile, receive their salvation because of the work of the “Deliverer” who died on the cross for their sins.

But this means, of course, that the Commission’s understanding of Romans 11:29 as referring only to the Jews and only to the Jewish old covenant that it assumes has never been revoked, is totally incorrect. The “irrevocable gifts and call of God” is the New Covenant in Jesus Christ that was first given to their forefather Abraham and which, at the death of Christ, formally replaced the Jewish old covenant; and the New Covenant is for both Jew and Gentile who wish to receive salvation. It also means that the Jews do not have a separate and exclusive covenant from God; it also means that the Jews are no longer the “chosen people”; it also means that the Jews are still in desperate need to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ; and it also means that the “chosen people” refers only to the Jews and Gentiles who have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The Commission: 19. For an outside observer, the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra aetate” could give the impression that the text deals with the relations of the Catholic Church with all world religions in a relationship based on parity, but the history of its development and the text itself point in a different direction. Originally Saint Pope John

11 This is a quote from Genesis 12:3.
XXIII proposed that the Council should promulgate a Tractatus de Iudaïis, but in the end the decision was made to give consideration to all world religions in “Nostra aetate”. However, the fourth article of this Conciliar Declaration, which deals with a new theological relationship with Judaism, represents almost the heart of the document, in which a place is also made for the Catholic Church’s relationship with other religions. The relationship with Judaism can in that sense be seen as the catalyst for the determination of the relationship with the other world religions.

20. Nevertheless, from the theological perspective the dialogue with Judaism has a completely different character and is on a different level in comparison with the other world religions. The faith of the Jews testified to in the Bible, found in the Old Testament, is not for Christians another religion but the foundation of their own faith, although clearly the figure of Jesus is the sole key for the Christian interpretation of the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The cornerstone of the Christian faith is Jesus (cf. Acts 4:11; 1 Pt 2:4–8). However, the dialogue with Judaism occupies a unique position for Christians; Christianity is by its roots connected with Judaism as with no other religion. Therefore the Jewish-Christian dialogue can only with reservations be termed ‘interreligious dialogue’ in the true sense of the expression; one could however speak of a kind of ‘intra-religious’ or ‘intra-familial’ dialogue sui generis. In his address in the Roman Synagogue on 13 April 1986 Saint Pope John Paul II expressed this situation in these words: “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.”

R. Sungenis: Although the Old Testament is certainly the root of the Christian faith, it is because the Old Testament speaks of and points to Jesus Christ, not because the Old Testament was “Jewish.” As the Old Testament itself sadly testifies, most Jews did not believe or obey what was written in the Old Testament, which is precisely why Israel had so much trouble in its existence. The other reality is, “Judaism” did not exist in the Old Testament. Judaism is the term commonly given to what the Jews believe today, which is more from the Talmud, the Mishnah, the Zohar, and modern philosophical thought mixed with various cultural and religious ideas from various sources – all of which deny the very essence of the Old Testament, namely, Jesus Christ. The Jews of today do not believe the same thing, nor can they believe the same thing, as the Jews of the Old Testament. Therefore, dialogue with Judaism today is not a dialogue with the “foundation of the Christian faith,” but a dialogue with a hydra that was formed when the Jews made their final rejection of Christ at the cross. The Jews of today are certainly sui generis, but they are not our “elder brothers,” nor is dialogue with them “intra-familial,” since Jesus Christ, the elder brother of the Jews in the Old Testament, was rejected by the Jews in the post-Old Testament era.

3. Revelation in history as ‘Word of God’ in Judaism and Christianity:

The Commission: 21. We find in the Old Testament God’s plan of salvation presented for his people (cf. “Dei verbum”, 14). This plan of salvation is expressed in an enlightening way at the beginning of biblical history in the call to Abraham (Gen 12ff). In order to reveal himself and speak to humankind, redeeming it from sin and gathering it together as one people, God began by choosing the people of Israel through Abraham and setting them apart. To them God revealed himself gradually through his emissaries, his prophets, as the true God, the only God, the living God, the redeeming God. This divine election was constitutive of the people of Israel. Only after the first great intervention of the redeeming God, the liberation from
slavery in Egypt (cf. Ex 13:17ff) and the establishment of the covenant at Sinai (Ex 19ff), did the twelve tribes truly become a nation and become conscious of being the people of God, the bearers of his message and his promises, witnesses of his merciful favour in the midst of the nations and also for the nations (cf. Is 26:1-9; 54; 60; 62). In order to instruct his people on how to fulfil their mission and how to pass on the revelation entrusted to them, God gave Israel the law which defines how they are to live (cf. Ex 20; Deut 5), and which distinguishes them from other peoples.

22. Like the Church itself even in our own day, Israel bears the treasure of its election in fragile vessels. The relationship of Israel with its Lord is the story of its faithfulness and its unfaithfulness. In order to fulfil his work of salvation despite the smallness and weakness of the instruments he chose, God manifested his mercy and the graciousness of his gifts, as well as his faithfulness to his promises which no human infidelity can nullify (cf. Rom 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13). At every step of his people along the way God set apart at least a ‘small number’ (cf. Deut 4:27), a ‘remnant’ (cf. Is 1:9; Zeph 3:12; cf. also Is 6:13; 17:5-6), a handful of the faithful who ‘have not bowed the knee to Baal’ (cf. 1 Kings 19:18). Through this remnant, God realized his plan of salvation. Constantly the object of his election and love remained the chosen people as through them – as the ultimate goal – the whole of humanity is gathered together and led to him.

23. The Church is called the new people of God (cf. “Nostra aetate”, No.4) but not in the sense that the people of God of Israel has ceased to exist. The Church “was prepared in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant” (“Lumen gentium”, 2). The Church does not replace the people of God of Israel, since as the community founded on Christ it represents in him the fulfilment of the promises made to Israel. This does not mean that Israel, not having achieved such a fulfilment, can no longer be considered to be the people of God. “Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures” (“Nostra aetate”, No.4).

R. Sungenis: Once again, the Commission is doing precisely what it has accused others of doing, namely, “…the Conciliar text is not infrequently over-interpreted, and things are read into it which it does not in fact contain.” Nostra aetate does not call the Jews of today “the people of God.” It uses the phrase “people of God” only one time, which is quoted in #23 above by the Commission itself, but that reference is to the Church alone. Moreover, there is no other official document from the Catholic Church which recognizes Israel as remaining “the people of God.” The Commission also seems to have difficulty recognizing that the Church has replaced Israel (e.g., supersessionism), basing its argument on the false idea that a “fulfillment of the promises made to Israel” somehow negates the fact that the Church replaces Israel.

The Commission: 24. God revealed himself in his Word, so that it may be understood by humanity in actual historical situations. This Word invites all people to respond. If their responses are in accord with the Word of God they stand in right relationship with him. For Jews this Word can be learned through the Torah and the traditions based on it. The Torah is the instruction for a successful life in right relationship with God. Whoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness (cf. Pirqé Avot II, 7). By observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God. In this regard, Pope Francis has stated: “The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word. In seeking a right attitude towards
God, Christians turn to Christ as the fount of new life, and Jews to the teaching of the Torah.” (Address to members of the International Council of Christians and Jews, 30 June 2015).

R. Sungenis: Notice how the Commission uses indicative statements about today’s Jews and the Torah that anyone would regard as true. For example, it is true that “for Jews this Word can be learned through the Torah” since the first five books of Moses certainly contain the word of God. It is also true to say that “the Torah is the instruction for a successful life” and it is true that “whoever observes the Torah has life in its fullness” and true also to say “by observing the Torah the Jew receives a share in communion with God.” But the caveat is, just because these statements are true does not mean they are good or salvific. Today’s Jew may get true instruction for a successful life from the Torah, but without Jesus Christ as the purpose and goal of the Torah, there is no salvation, and thus the Jew is to be pitied above all men. Today’s Jew might also “receive a share in communion with God” by reading the Torah, but that share will not be eternal salvation provided by Christ. Most important, however, is the fact that since the Commission is apparently teaching a false gospel to the Jews of today, then what applies to the Commission are the ominous words of Jesus in Matthew 18:9-6 or Luke 12:47-48

6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.
7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!

47 And that servant who knew his master’s will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. 48 But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more.

The Commission: 25. Judaism and the Christian faith as seen in the New Testament are two ways by which God’s people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own. The Scriptures which Christians call the Old Testament is open therefore to both ways. A response to God’s word of salvation that accords with one or the other tradition can thus open up access to God, even if it is left up to his counsel of salvation to determine in what way he may intend to save mankind in each instance. That his will for salvation is universally directed is testified by the Scriptures (cf. eg. Gen 12:1-3; Is 2:2-5; 1 Tim 2:4). Therefore there are not two paths to salvation according to the expression “Jews hold to the Torah, Christians hold to Christ”. Christian faith proclaims that Christ’s work of salvation is universal and involves all mankind. God’s word is one single and undivided reality which takes concrete form in each respective historical context.

R. Sungenis: By basing its argument on the idea that “A response to God’s word of salvation that accords with one or the other tradition can thus open up access to God, even if it is left up to his counsel of salvation to determine in what way he may intend to save mankind in each instance,” is a common methodology in liberal theology. It was taught in Karl Rahner’s theology of the “anonymous Christian,” and further explicated in Hans Urs von Balthasar’s book, Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved? It takes the exceptions to the Church’s doctrine “Outside the Church there is no Salvation” (which exceptions are based on the concept of “invincible ignorance” as taught by Pius IX in Quanto conficiamur moerore),12 and it tends to make the

12 August 10, 1863, Denzinger 1677: “And here, beloved Sons and Venerable Brothers, We should
exceptions into the rule. Hence, a Jew who, following Quanto's description of an "invincibly ignorant" person who can "receive eternal life" because he reads and obeys the Torah but is "ignorant of our most holy religion but who, zealously keeps the natural law and its precepts engraved in the hearts of all by God, and being ready to obey God, lives an honest and upright life... who has not the guilt of deliberate sin," the Commission has made into the rule of how and why God will save the Jew who believes in modern-day Judaism. Although various Jews may be saved by such "invincible ignorance," it is also true for many Protestants, Buddhists and all other religions and non-religions. Hence, the Jew has no distinction in this category.

Hence, the problem with the Commission's perspective is that "invincible ignorance" cannot be used to elevate Judaism as on par with Christianity in the realm of having access to God. As such the Commission cannot claim that Judaism and Christianity are merely "two ways by which God's people can make the Sacred Scriptures of Israel their own" nor conclude that "the Scriptures which Christians call the Old Testament is open therefore to both ways." Judaism is a bankrupt religion that has no power to enlighten or save anyone. Judaism's interpretation of Scripture must be rejected out-of-hand since it distorts almost every passage it reads in the Old Testament due to its refusal to see Christ as its core element. As St. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:14-16 concerning Jews who read the Old Testament:

14But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; 16but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

In fact, the more a Jew reads the Old Testament from the perspective of Judaism the more he is hardened against Christ, especially when he consults Judaism's official authorities such as the Talmud, the Mishnah, the Zohar, as well as the Jewish World Congress and the local rabbi.

The Commission: 26. In this sense, Christians affirm that Jesus Christ can be considered as ‘the living Torah of God’. Torah and Christ are the Word of God, his revelation for us human beings as testimony of his boundless love. For Christians, the pre-existence of Christ as the Word and Son of the Father is a fundamental doctrine,

R. Sungenis: Yes, “Christians affirm that Jesus Christ can be considered as ‘the living Torah of God’” because Christian do not have the veil over their minds as the Jews do.

The Commission: and according to rabbinical tradition the Torah and the name of the Messiah exist already before creation (cf. Genesis Rabbah 1, 1).
**R. Sungenis:** The problem, of course, is that rabbis from Judaism do not believe the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament is Jesus Christ born of Mary, and son of David (cf. Gen. 3:15; Deut 18:18; Isaiah 59:20; Dan 9:25-26). They believe their messiah is someone else other than Jesus Christ.

**The Commission:** Further, according to Jewish understanding God himself interprets the Torah in the Eschaton, while in Christian understanding everything is recapitulated in Christ in the end (cf. Eph 1:10; Col 1:20). In the gospel of Matthew Christ is seen as the ‘new Moses’. Matthew 5:17–19 presents Jesus as the authoritative and authentic interpreter of the Torah (cf. Lk 24:27, 45–47). In the rabbinical literature, however, we find the identification of the Torah with Moses. Against this background, Christ as the ‘new Moses’ can be connected with the Torah. Torah and Christ are the locus of the presence of God in the world as this presence is experienced in the respective worship communities. The Hebrew *dabar* means word and event at the same time – and thus one may reach the conclusion that the word of the Torah may be open for the Christ event.

**R. Sungenis:** So we see that the Commission is reduced to stating the beliefs of Christianity over against those of Judaism but has no way of ever combining the two since the key element, Christ, is the dividing line. The Commission believes that “dialogue” is useful, however, because it knows that, psychologically speaking, listing the beliefs and perspectives of modern Judaism has the effect of pacifying the opposition. If you repeat something often enough, even though it is untrue, sometimes people will believe it.

4. **The relationship between the Old and New Testament and the Old and New Covenant:**

**The Commission:** 27. The covenant that God has offered Israel is irrevocable.

**R. Sungenis:** Correct, as long as we understand that the covenant that is irrevocable is the New Covenant in Christ, the same covenant by which Abraham was justified at least a quarter century before the Jews even existed (cf. Genesis 12:3; 15:6; Gal 3:6-8; Rom. 4:1-22; Heb. 6:13-18; 8:1-13), and the same covenant by which Enoch, Noah, Moses and David, and all the Old Testament remnant was justified (cf. Galatians 3:9-29; Hebrews 11:1-40). It is not the Old Covenant, the Mosaic covenant, that is irrevocable, since Hebrews is quite clear that the covenant with Moses was revoked to make way for the irrevocable covenant in Christ (cf. Heb. 7:18; 8:13; 10:9).

**The Commission:** “God is not man, that he should lie” (Num 23:19; cf. 2 Tim 2:13).

**R. Sungenis:** Correct, but the Commission is written by men, who can and do lie.

**The Commission:** The permanent elective fidelity of God expressed in earlier covenants is never repudiated (cf. Rom 9:4; 11:1–2).

**R. Sungenis:** God’s “elective fidelity” has nothing to do with whether he decides to revoke an earlier covenant, since the revoking of a covenant depends on whether God, when he initiated the covenant, declared whether he could revoke it. In fact, if God said he was going to revoke a covenant and did not do so, then God would not have “elective fidelity.” As St. Paul says in Gal. 3:19: “Then what is the purpose of the Law? It was added to deal with crimes until the ‘progeny’ to whom the promise had been made should come” (cf. Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:1-13).
An Analysis of Romans 9:4

The Commission's use of Rom. 9:4 and 11:1-2 to try to prove its point only exposes its ineptness to deal with this subject matter. Rom. 9:4 is especially slippery. The Greek original does not have a verb in the sentence and thus the translator must supply one, but depending on the tense of the verb he supplies, he can make it appear as if the Jews still possess the previous covenants and practices they had in the Old Testament.

Here is the Revised Standard Version's translation of Rom. 9:4, a Protestant translation from 1952, which is very popular among Catholic liberals:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises

Notice that the RSV (which was known for its Jewish slants) chose the present tense verb “belong” to make up for the lack of a Greek verb. Unfortunately, this verb choice gives the impression that the Israelites might still possess the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the law, the worship and the promises. At least that is what the Commission wants you to believe by using the RSV’s Romans 9:4 as a proof text to its thesis.14

Notice the NAB does not add a verb but translates without one, and thus it is much closer to the original Greek. Although “theirs the adoption” sounds a little awkward from an English perspective, it does the more important thing, which is not give the impression to the reader that the Jews still possess the adoption, the covenants, the law, etc.

A much more appropriate and contextually accurate translation is made in the New Jerusalem Bible, which is a Catholic translation. It renders Romans 9:4 as follows:

They are Israelites; it was they who were adopted as children, the glory was theirs and the covenants; to them were given the Law and the worship of God and the promises.

Notice that the verb supplied is in the past tense, and it is the correct tense to use in this situation. In other words, Romans 9:4 teaches that the Jews once had these gifts and privileges, and the implication is that they no longer have them. This agrees with the context of Romans 9-10. It is trying to explain why the Jews lost favor with God. His concluding statement in Romans 9:28-32 is this:

What should we say, then? That the gentiles, although they were not looking for saving justice, found it, and this was the saving justice that comes of faith; 31 while Israel, looking for saving justice by law-keeping, did not

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13 The Greek, without textual variants, reads: οἵτινές εἰσιν Ἰσραήλιται, ὃν ἡ νοοθεσία καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ αἱ διαθήκαι καὶ ἡ νομοθεσία καὶ ἡ λατρεία καὶ αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι, which translated literally in English is: “who are Israelites, of whom the adoption, and the glory and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the worship and the promises.”

14 I will also add here that when the USCCB voted in 2008 to replace the problematic sentence “Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them,” on page 131 of the 2006 United States Catholic Catechism for Adults, they chose Romans 9:4 from the RSV Protestant translation as the replacement sentence instead its normal use of the New American Bible, a Catholic translation. The reason appears to be because the RSV allows a present possession of the covenant by Israel, while the NAB does not.
succeed in fulfilling the Law. And why? Because they were trying to find it in actions and not in faith, and so they stumbled over the stumbling-stone-as it says in scripture: Now I am laying in Zion a stumbling-stone, a rock to trip people up; but he who relies on this will not be brought to disgrace.

The Commission: The New Covenant does not revoke the earlier covenants, but it brings them to fulfilment.

R. Sungenis: Here we see the same problem that the Commission had earlier, namely, the unproven premise that when a covenant “fulfills” another it means that the earlier covenant cannot be revoked. This is quite a fallacious argument and has no precedent in Catholic teaching. The Commission is repudiating the teaching in Hebrews that the Old Covenant was revoked (as well as repudiating 2 Cor 3:6-14; Col 2:14-15; Eph 2:14-15), for the flimsy and novel excuse that the Hebrew epistle wasn’t written to unbelieving Jews but only to Jewish Christians.

The Commission: Through the Christ event Christians have understood that all that had gone before was to be interpreted anew. For Christians the New Covenant has acquired a quality of its own, even though the orientation for both consists in a unique relationship with God (cf. for example, the covenant formula in Lev 26:12, “I will be your God and you will be my people”). For Christians, the New Covenant in Christ is the culminating point of the promises of salvation of the Old Covenant, and is to that extent never independent of it. The New Covenant is grounded in and based on the Old, because it is ultimately the God of Israel who concludes the Old Covenant with his people Israel and enables the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Jesus lives during the period of the Old Covenant, but in his work of salvation in the New Covenant confirms and perfects the dimensions of the Old. The term covenant, therefore, means a relationship with God that takes effect in different ways for Jews and Christians. The New Covenant can never replace the Old but presupposes it and gives it a new dimension of meaning, by reinforcing the personal nature of God as revealed in the Old Covenant and establishing it as openness for all who respond faithfully from all the nations (cf. Zech 8:20-23; Psalm 87).

R. Sungenis: On the face of it, if we use the conventional meaning of “covenant,” the Commission’s statement is false. A covenant is specified by the nature of the covenant when it is given. If it is created to be temporary, then it cannot last forever. If it is created to be forever, then it cannot be temporary. Scripture and Tradition are clear that the Mosaic covenant was temporary and has been revoked; and it is also clear that the New Covenant superseded the Mosaic covenant and is forever and therefore will never be revoked. That much is clear.

But, of course, the Commission has a card up its sleeve. We will find as we move on in its document that the Commission often switches its definition of “Old Covenant.” Sometimes it is referring to a specific covenant in the Old Testament. Sometimes it is referring to more than one covenant in the Old Testament. Sometimes it is referring to the Old Testament scriptures themselves. It makes all these moves without notifying the reader which definition of the “covenant” it is using at a particular time.

The Commission: 28. Unity and difference between Judaism and Christianity come to the fore in the first instance with the testimonies of divine revelation. With the existence of the Old Testament as an integral part of the one Christian Bible, there is a deeply rooted sense of intrinsic kinship between Judaism and Christianity. The roots of Christianity lie in the Old Testament, and Christianity constantly draws nourishment from these roots. However, Christianity is grounded in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is
recognised as the Messiah promised to the Jewish people, and as the only begotten Son of God who has communicated himself through the Holy Spirit following his death on the cross and his resurrection. With the existence of the New Testament, the question naturally arose quite soon of how the two testaments are related to one another, whether for example the New Testament writings have not superseded the older writings and nullified them. This position was represented by Marcion, who in the second century held that the New Testament had made the Old Testament book of promises obsolete, destined to fade away in the glow of the new, just as one no longer needs the light of the moon as soon as the sun has risen. This stark antithesis between the Hebrew and the Christian Bible never became an official doctrine of the Christian Church. By excluding Marcion from the Christian community in 144, the Church rejected his concept of a purely “Christian” Bible purged of all Old Testament elements, bore witness to its faith in the one and only God who is the author of both testaments, and thus held fast to the unity of both testaments, the “concordia testamentorum”.

**R. Sungenis:** This is little more than a misdirection by the Commission. Instead of focusing on the Old Covenant, *per se*, the Commission now speaks about the Old Testament; and from this uses the word “superseded” to teach that the New Testament did not supersede the Old Testament. No one worth their theological salt would argue against this point, however. The Old Testament is still alive and well. In fact, it still contains prophecies that will only be fulfilled at the end of time (e.g., Isaiah 65:17; Daniel 9:27) so obviously it cannot be “superseded” by the New Testament. The issue is not, however, whether the Old Testament scriptures are superseded, but whether certain covenants contained in the Old Testament scriptures have been superseded!

**The Commission:** 29. This is of course only one side of the relationship between the two testaments. The common patrimony of the Old Testament not only formed the fundamental basis of a spiritual kinship between Jews and Christians but also brought with it a basic tension in the relationship of the two faith communities. This is demonstrated by the fact that Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the New, in the conviction expressed by Augustine in the indelible formula: “In the Old Testament the New is concealed and in the New the Old is revealed” (Quaestiones in Heptateuchum 2, 73). Pope Gregory the Great also spoke in the same sense when he defined the Old Testament as “the prophecy of the New” and the latter as the “best exposition of the Old” (Homiliae in Ezechielem I, VI, 15; cf. “Dei verbum”, 16).

30. This Christological exegesis can easily give rise to the impression that Christians consider the New Testament not only as the fulfilment of the Old but at the same time as a replacement for it.

**R. Sungenis:** Notice what the Commission is doing. It is once again using its unproven premise that “fulfillment does not mean replacement.” But instead of applying it strictly to the “Covenant” issue, the Commission applies it to the “Testament” issue so that it can establish its premise (i.e., “fulfillment does not mean replacement”). The Commission knows that its premise will not work with the Covenant issue since Hebrews is clear that the Mosaic covenant was indeed revoked. So, quite deliberately, it juxtaposes “Covenant” with “Testament.” It is a shell game, to be sure.

**The Commission:** That this impression cannot be correct is evident already from the fact that Judaism too found itself compelled to adopt a new reading of Scripture after the catastrophe of the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70. Since the Sadducees who were bound to the temple did not
survive this catastrophe, the rabbis, following in the footsteps of the Pharisees, who had already developed their particular mode of reading and interpreting Scripture, now did so without the temple as the centre of Jewish religious devotion.

31. As a consequence there were two responses to this situation, or more precisely, two new ways of reading Scripture, namely the Christological exegesis of the Christians and the rabbinical exegesis of that form of Judaism that developed historically. Since each mode involved a new interpretation of Scripture, the crucial new question must be precisely how these two modes are related to each other. But since the Christian Church and post-biblical rabbinical Judaism developed in parallel, but also in opposition and mutual ignorance, this question cannot be answered from the New Testament alone.

**R. Sungenis:** We see here the same kind of exoneration of the Pharisees that is common in left wing theological literature. Instead of continuing the exposing of the wickedness and misguided interpretations of the Pharisees that the Four Evangelists give us in the Gospels, liberal theology seeks to put a good light on the Pharisees and their successors, the rabbis. The effect is to create an atmosphere in which post-biblical Judaism has a legitimate right to interpret Scripture the way their religion leads them; and the Commission is essentially agreeing with that right. The truth is, the Pharisees fomented the death of Christ and wanted nothing to do with his heavenly teaching, and the rabbis followed suit.

**The Commission:** After centuries of opposing positions it has been the duty of Jewish-Catholic dialogue to bring these two new ways of reading the Biblical writings into dialogue with one another in order to perceive the “rich complementarity” where it exists and “to help one another to mine the riches of God’s word” (“Evangeli gaudium”, 249). The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible” in 2001 therefore stated that Christians can and must admit “that the Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one, in continuity with the Jewish Scriptures from the Second Temple period, a reading analogous to the Christian reading which developed in parallel fashion”. It then draws the conclusion: “Both readings are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths, of which the readings are the result and expression. Consequently, both are irreducible” (No. 22).

**R. Sungenis:** First, in the words “After centuries of opposing positions,” the Commission, via the Pontifical Biblical Commission, openly admits that its way of dealing with the divide between Christianity and Judaism is a very novel approach that in its essence rejects the 20-century patrimony that was laid down in Catholic tradition. So not only has the Commission rejected various Scriptures that don’t agree with its novel position (e.g., Hebrews 7:18; 8:1-13; 10:9, which speak of the revocation of the Old Covenant); as well as given a false exegesis of various Scriptures it desires to use for its novel position (e.g., Romans 9:4; 11:29), it has also rejected Tradition. It has more or less also rejected the Magisterium, since it has distorted the Church’s only official teaching on the Jews, namely, *Nostra aetate*. Second, to claim that the “Jewish reading of the Bible is a possible one” and that the Jewish interpretations that are produced after the Second Temple period (511 BC to 70 AD) are “irreducible” (i.e., they cannot be changed or diluted), and that contradictions against Christianity produced in these interpretations are permitted because “both reading are bound up with the vision of their respective faiths,” are some of the most heterodox conclusions ever to be made by a sitting institution going by the name Catholic, and especially the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC). But it has long been known that the PBC is nothing but a modernistic, liberal, left-wing entity that has
been spitting out heterodox statements for quite some time that essentially deny the Catholic faith of tradition. It was bad enough in the early 1970s when Paul VI, even as modernistic as he was, took away the authority of the PBC due to its heterodox teachings. It is even worse now. Since the modern Catholic Church is more or less under the delusion of a Hegelian synthesis, nothing is ever black or white and right or wrong for its liberal hierarchs. The reality is this: of the two interpretations, the one that sees Christ as the focus of Scripture and the one that eliminates Christ, cannot both be “possible.” Only one is possible; the other is impossible.

The Commission: 32. Since each of the two readings serves the purpose of rightly understanding God’s will and word, it becomes evident how important is the awareness that the Christian faith is rooted in the faith of Abraham. That raises the further question of how the Old and the New Covenant stand in relation to one another. For the Christian faith it is axiomatic that there can only be one single covenant history of God with humanity. The covenant with Abraham, with circumcision as its sign (cf. Gen 17), and the covenant with Moses restricted to Israel regarding obedience to the law (cf. Ex 19:5; 24:7-8) and in particular the observance of the Sabbath (cf. Ex 31:16-17) had been extended in the covenant with Noah, with the rainbow as its sign (cf. “Verbum Domini”, 117), to the whole of creation (cf. Gen 9:9 ff). Through the prophets God in turn promises a new and eternal covenant (cf. Is 55:3; 61:8; Jer 31:31-34; Ez 36:22-28). Each of these covenants incorporates the previous covenant and interprets it in a new way. That is also true for the New Covenant which for Christians is the final eternal covenant and therefore the definitive interpretation of what was promised by the prophets of the Old Covenant, or as Paul expresses it, the “Yes” and “Amen” to “all that God has promised” (2 Cor 1:20).

R. Sungenis: No, the New Covenant does not “incorporate” the Mosaic covenant. It nullifies the Mosaic covenant and replaces it. The Mosaic covenant, as a legal entity, no longer exists today. Its ceremonial, civil and moral laws have been completely abrogated. Either the Mosaic law is abrogated in toto or it cannot be abrogated at all.

The only thing that legally exists from the Mosaic covenant are those parts of it that the New Covenant has legally made its own, such as Nine of the Ten Commandments (cf. Romans 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). If the Mosaic law had not been abrogated, then every Catholic should be in fear for his life, since the Mosaic law requires that those of other religions who claim to be superior to the Mosaic religion are to be executed.

Additionally, the New Covenant does not “incorporate” the full Abrahamic covenant; rather, it only incorporates the spiritual part, not the physical part. God’s covenant with Abraham had two parts. One part was spiritual and provided salvation for both Jew and Gentile (cf. Genesis 12:1-3; Gal 3:6-8). This part was incorporated into the New Covenant (cf. Luke 1:68-79; Rom. 4:1-22; Heb. 8:1-13). The second part was not incorporated into the New Covenant, since it was a physical covenant strictly for the Jews (Genesis 15:18-21), and it transitioned into the Mosaic covenant (cf. Genesis 17:12; Lev. 12:3). It was temporary and was fulfilled in the Old Testament (cf. Joshua 21:43-45; 1Kings 8:56; Nehemiah 9:7-8; Acts 15:12; Gal. 5:3).

See diagram below:

1) Abraham’s physical covenant  Mosaic covenant (temporary)

2) Abrahamic spiritual covenant  Christ’s covenant (eternal)
The Commission: The Church as the renewed people of God has been elected by God without conditions. The Church is the definitive and unsurpassable locus of the salvific action of God. This however does not mean that Israel as the people of God has been repudiated or has lost its mission (cf."Nostra aetate", No.4). The New Covenant for Christians is therefore neither the annulment nor the replacement, but the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Covenant.

R. Sungenis: We will just repeat here what we stated previously. (1) Israel is not the "people of God," since neither Nostra aetate nor any other official teaching of the Catholic Church so designates Israel. (2) The New Covenant annuls and replaces the Mosaic covenant at the same time that it fulfills it. In fact, once the New Covenant fulfills the Mosaic covenant (e.g., John 19:30), the Mosaic covenant is annulled (cf. Matt. 27:51; Ex 26:31; Hebrews 10:5-12). (3) The Commission is under the mistaken idea that a fulfilled covenant cannot be annulled.

The Commission: 33. For Jewish-Christian dialogue in the first instance God's covenant with Abraham proves to be constitutive, as he is not only the father of Israel but also the father of the faith of Christians. In this covenant community it should be evident for Christians that the covenant that God concluded with Israel has never been revoked but remains valid on the basis of God's unfailing faithfulness to his people, and consequently the New Covenant which Christians believe in can only be understood as the affirmation and fulfilment of the Old.

R. Sungenis: Notice that the Commission doesn't tell us which "covenant that God concluded with Israel" it is referring to (e.g., the Abrahamic spiritual covenant, the Abrahamic physical covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Old Testament scriptures) so it is almost useless to argue the point. It is to the Commission's advantage to keep the "covenant with Israel" as vague and ambiguous as possible so that it cannot be accused of violating Scripture and Tradition. For the record, however, we will do what the Commission failed to do. We will be specific as to what "covenant with Israel" is eternal and what "covenant with Israel" is revoked. The Abrahamic spiritual covenant with Israel that transitioned into the New Covenant is eternal, while the Abrahamic physical covenant which transitioned into the Mosaic covenant was temporary and was revoked by the New Covenant. Note also that the promised revoking of the Mosaic covenant and the promised eternal keeping of the New Covenant are both due to "God's unfailing faithfulness to his people."

The Commission: Christians are therefore also convinced that through the New Covenant the Abrahamic covenant has obtained that universality for all peoples which was originally intended in the call of Abram (cf. Gen 12:1-3). This recourse to the Abrahamic covenant is so essentially constitutive of the Christian faith that the Church without Israel would be in danger of losing its locus in the history of salvation. By the same token, Jews could with regard to the Abrahamic covenant arrive at the insight that Israel without the Church would be in danger of remaining too particularist and of failing to grasp the universality of its experience of God. In this fundamental sense Israel and the Church remain bound to each other according to the covenant and are interdependent.

R. Sungenis: This above is a distorted way to understand the issue. There is only one covenant today, and that is the New Covenant in Christ. Israel does not have a covenant with God, and Israel is no longer "the people of God." The only covenant available for the Jews who live today is the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. If they do not accept that covenant, there is no other covenant that can save them.
The Commission: 34. That there can only be one history of God’s covenant with mankind, and that consequently Israel is God’s chosen and beloved people of the covenant which has never been repealed or revoked (cf. Rom 9:4; 11:29), is the conviction behind the Apostle Paul’s passionate struggle with the dual fact that while the Old Covenant from God continues to be in force, Israel has not adopted the New Covenant.

R. Sungenis: Israel is no longer “God’s chosen” and they no longer have a covenant with God since the Mosaic covenant has been repealed. Moreover, there is only a remnant of Jews who are saved, and that is because they have put their trust in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ, the only covenant between God and man existing today, and these Jewish Christians have forsaken any national or race-based claims on God or salvation.

As we have seen earlier, the proof text that the Commission attempts to use, namely, Romans 9:4, does not teach that Israel still retains a covenant with God but only that it once had such a covenant. It is a disgrace to Catholicism to see the Commission use Romans 9:4 as a proof text since it obvious to any scholar that the verse is without a verb; that translations differ because of it, and the context of Romans 9 is referring to Israel’s past, not its present.

It is also a disgrace to see the Commission attempting to use Romans 11:29 to prove that Israel still has an exclusive covenant with God when, in fact, Romans 11:29 does not even mention the word “covenant.”

Finally, since Romans 9:4 and Romans 11:29 are the only proof texts the Commission brings forth, we can safely conclude that its whole theory is bankrupt, and dare we say, heretical.

The Commission: In order to do justice to both facts Paul coined the expressive image of the root of Israel into which the wild branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom 11:16-21).

R. Sungenis: This is a misrepresentation of the analogy of the olive tree. Paul does not say “root of Israel.” He refers to Israel as a “branch,” not the “root.” One cannot be both a branch and a root, which means that someone else is the root, which is Christ. Let’s look very closely at Romans 11:17-21:

17But if some of the branches [Israel] were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot [Gentiles], were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree [Christ].

18do not boast over the branches [Israel]. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root [Christ], but the root that supports you.

19You will say, "Branches [Israel] were broken off so that I might be grafted in."

20That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe.

21For if God did not spare the natural branches [Israel], neither will he spare you.

The Commission: One could say that Jesus Christ bears in himself the living root of the “green olive tree”, and yet in a deeper meaning that the whole promise has its root in him (cf. Jn 8:58).
R. Sungenis: So then, if the Commission concedes that Christ is the root, how can Israel be the root? The Commission seems to be very confused, but that is what usually happens when you are not telling the truth.

The Commission: This image represents for Paul the decisive key to thinking of the relationship between Israel and the Church in the light of faith. With this image Paul gives expression to the duality of the unity and divergence of Israel and the Church.

R. Sungenis: Not quite. Paul is not interested in the ecumenical duality and divergence that the Commission is pushing. The only reason Paul uses the olive tree analogy is to show the Gentiles that they cannot boast of their own salvation, for just as God cut off Israel for disobedience, God can cut off the Gentiles. An olive tree, which has branches cut off and grafted in, is the best way Paul can make this clear to the Gentiles.

The Commission: On the one hand the image is to be taken seriously in the sense that the grafted wild branches have not their origin as branches in the plant onto which they are grafted and their new situation represents a new reality and a new dimension of God’s work of salvation, so that the Christian Church cannot merely be understood as a branch or a fruit of Israel (cf. Mt 8:10-13). On the other hand, the image is also to be taken seriously in the sense that the Church draws nourishment and strength from the root of Israel, and that the grafted branches would wither or even die if they were cut off from the root of Israel (cf. “Ecclesia in Medio Oriente”, 21).

R. Sungenis: No, the Church does not draw nourishment from the “root of Israel” for Israel is not the root in Paul’s analogy. Christ is the root, and Israel is merely a branch. What is even more disconcerting is the Commission distortion of Benedict XVI’s exhortation, Ecclesia in Medio Oriente. Paragraph 21 of the exhortation reads as follows:

21. Christians ought to become more conscious of the depth of the mystery of the Incarnation in order to love God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their might (cf. Dt 6:5). Christ, the Son of God, became flesh in a people, a faith tradition and a culture which, if better known, can only enrich the understanding of the Christian faith. Christians have come to this deeper understanding thanks to the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Lk 24:26). But they must always be aware of and grateful for their roots. For the shoot grafted onto the ancient tree to take (cf. Rom 11:17-18), it needs the sap rising from the roots.15

Notice that Benedict XVI makes no reference to “root of Israel.” In fact, the only reference Benedict gives us to what “root” he has in view is two references to Christ. Whatever else Benedict XVI believed about the relationship between Christians and Jews, he never says “Israel is the root” in Paul’s analogy.

In fact, Benedict XVI is the only recent pope to admit that the Old Covenant has been revoked. In his book Many Religions – One Covenant the then Cardinal Ratzinger wrote:

“Thus the Sinai [Mosaic] Covenant is indeed superseded.”16

Earlier in his book he stated something similar:

What strikes us first of all is that Paul makes a firm disjunction between the covenant in Christ and the Mosaic covenant; this is how we usually

16 Many Religions – One Covenant, 1998, p. 70.
understand the difference between the 'Old' and the 'New' Covenant. Paul's sharpest contrast between the two Testaments is to be found in 2 Corinthians 3:4-18 and Galatians 4:21-31. Whereas the term 'New Covenant' comes from prophecy (Jer 31:31) and so form a link between both parts of the Bible, the expression 'Old Covenant' occurs only in 2 Corinthians 3:14.17

The Cardinal was quite correct. Unlike the Commission's vague and ambiguous statements, St. Paul makes a firm and vigorous disjunction between the covenant of Christ and the Mosaic covenant. He is also correct in stating that the expression "old covenant" only appears in 2 Cor. 3:14, but we can add that the context of that chapter is speaking only about the Mosaic covenant. Thus, the "old covenant," according to Scripture's terminology, is the Mosaic covenant; and that covenant, according to this chapter and the book of Hebrews, and in total contradiction to the Commission's view, was abrogated at the coming of Christ.

5. The universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and God's unrevoked covenant with Israel.

The Commission: 35. Since God has never revoked his covenant with his people Israel, there cannot be different paths or approaches to God’s salvation.

R. Sungenis: Again, the Commission does not identify what "covenant with his people Israel" it is referring to. Consequently, the author of the Commission’s document is ignorant of the different covenants and which covenants are eternal and which are revoked, or, he is deliberately avoiding the distinctions among the covenants for his own purposes.

The Commission: The theory that there may be two different paths to salvation, the Jewish path without Christ and the path with the Christ, whom Christians believe is Jesus of Nazareth, would in fact endanger the foundations of Christian faith. Confessing the universal and therefore also exclusive mediation of salvation through Jesus Christ belongs to the core of Christian faith. So too does the confession of the one God, the God of Israel, who through his revelation in Jesus Christ has become totally manifest as the God of all peoples, insofar as in him the promise has been fulfilled that all peoples will pray to the God of Israel as the one God (cf. Is 56:1-8). The document “Notes on the correct way to present the Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church” published by the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1985 therefore maintained that the Church and Judaism cannot be represented as “two parallel ways to salvation”, but that the Church must “witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all” (No. I, 7). The Christian faith confesses that God wants to lead all people to salvation, that Jesus Christ is the universal mediator of salvation, and that there is no "other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).

R. Sungenis: This above paragraph is essentially correct, but it will be contradicted by the paragraph below. It reminds me of what Cardinal Kasper said of some of the controversial documents of Vatican II. Since the conservatives and liberals at the Council could not come to agreement on various issues, the documents of Vatican II were designed so that one paragraph would contain the conservative view, and another the liberal view. Kasper stated:

In many places, [the Council Fathers] had to find compromise formulas, in which, often, the positions of the majority are located immediately next to those of the minority, designed to delimit them. Thus, the conciliar texts themselves have a huge potential for

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17 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
conflict, open the door to a selective reception in either direction.\footnote{L’Osservatore Romano on April 12, 2013.}

**The Commission:** 36. From the Christian confession that there can be only one path to salvation, however, it does not in any way follow that the Jews are excluded from God’s salvation because they do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. Such a claim would find no support in the soteriological understanding of Saint Paul, who in the Letter to the Romans not only gives expression to his conviction that there can be no breach in the history of salvation, but that salvation comes from the Jews (cf. also Jn 4:22).

**R. Sungenis:** The Commission is wrong on two counts here. First, St. Paul does not refer to John 4:22, and he never says that “salvation comes from the Jews.” St. Paul is clear that salvation comes from Jesus Christ, through the Church, by means of baptism. Second, the Commission takes John 4:22 out of context and makes it appear that what Jesus said on the Old Covenant side of the cross is still true on the New Testament side of the cross.

**The Commission:** God entrusted Israel with a unique mission, and He does not bring his mysterious plan of salvation for all peoples (cf. 1 Tim 2:4) to fulfilment without drawing into it his “first-born son” (Ex 4:22). From this it is self-evident that Paul in the Letter to the Romans definitively negates the question he himself has posed, whether God has repudiated his own people. Just as decisively he asserts: “For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). That the Jews are participants in God’s salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery.

**R. Sungenis:** As noted above, barring incidents of “invincible ignorance” for various Jews, it is totally irresponsible for the Commission to pose a dilemma wondering “how the salvation of the Jew can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery.” There is no mystery. The only reason the Commission finds itself in such a dilemma is that its exegesis of Scripture and its
theological methodology have become victim to a Hegelian synthesis in which there are only shades of gray and nothing is black or white. The only mystery here is how the Commission can reach the dubious conclusions it has.

**The Commission:** It is therefore no accident that Paul's soteriological reflections in Romans 9-11 on the irrevocable redemption of Israel against the background of the Christ-mystery culminate in a magnificent doxology: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways” (Rom 11:33).

**R. Sungenis:** Notice how the Commission has become so confident in its novel approach that it changes the words of Romans 11:29 from “the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable” to “the irrevocable redemption of Israel.” So let's reiterate. The “gifts and call” of God refer to the gift of salvation and the call to that salvation that God first promised to Abraham. That offer of salvation to Israel is thus irrevocable, because God does not go back on his promises. God swore an oath to Abraham because Abraham obeyed God (cf. Genesis 22; James 2:21-24; Heb. 6:13-18) and thus his promise is irrevocable. But here is the rub; whether “Israel” will accept the “gifts and call of God” remains a question. St. Paul's answer to that provocative question is recorded in Romans 11:23: “if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.” Hence, there is no automatic salvation for the Jews and thus there is no “irrevocable redemption of Israel.” The “call” is irrevocable; the response is not.

**The Commission:** Bernard of Clairvaux (De cons. III/I, 3) says that for the Jews “a determined point in time has been fixed which cannot be anticipated”.

**R. Sungenis:** This is another misapprehension in popular Catholic thought. There is no “determined point in time that has been fixed” to save the Jews. When the “gift and call of God” is answered by Israel, it is not going to be some future event of mass proportions. St. Paul nowhere teaches that scenario. St. Paul is very clear in Romans (which is the only book and chapter that addresses this issue) that the salvation of Israel will be a “remnant” just as it was in the time of Elijah (Rom. 11:2-5); and because of this prophecy given to him by God himself, Paul only expects “to save some” of the Jews, not all (Rom. 11:14). Hence, when Paul says in Rom. 11:26, “and thus all Israel shall be saved,” he is not referring to all the Jews who will live on earth at some future time in history, but to all the Jews, beginning from Abraham, to the 7,000 in the time of Elijah, to the remnant of Jews in the present day, who receive salvation. Paul uses “all Israel” simply to show that all who God “elected” from Israel will receive his salvation (Romans 9:6; 11:7). In other words, “all” of the elect will be saved, and not one will be lost (cf. John 6:37, 44; 10:28-29; Rom. 11:5, 28).

**The Commission:** 37. Another focus for Catholics must continue to be the highly complex theological question of how Christian belief in the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ can be combined in a coherent way with the equally clear statement of faith in the never-revoked covenant of God with Israel. It is the belief of the Church that Christ is the Saviour for all. There cannot be two ways of salvation, therefore, since Christ is also the Redeemer of the Jews in addition to the Gentiles.

**R. Sungenis:** The Commission is creating a problem where none exists. The problem started when the Commission insisted that God’s covenant with Israel (national and ethnic Israel) has not been revoked. This fallacious idea will inevitably create insurmountable problems for the remaining issues the Commission must answer. Through it all, the Commission shows itself inept to exegete even the simplest passage of Scripture and it fails to respect even the
simplest teachings from twenty centuries of Catholic tradition.

The Commission: Here we confront the mystery of God’s work, which is not a matter of missionary efforts to convert Jews, but rather the expectation that the Lord will bring about the hour when we will all be united, “when all peoples will call on God with one voice and ‘serve him shoulder to shoulder’” ("Nostra aetate", No. 4).

R. Sungenis: Essentially, what the Commission is trying to do is solve the dilemma it created by concluding that it is not the Church’s responsibility to preach the Gospel to the Jews in order to save them; rather, it is God’s responsibility to solve the problem and thus he must take the responsibility to save the Jews in order to abide by the alleged “unrevoked” covenant he has with Israel. This turns Christianity and its Gospel on its head. It is not God’s responsibility to save the Jews at some time in the future. It is the Church’s responsibility to continue to preach the Gospel to the Jews in hopes, as St. Paul says, that we may “save some of them” (Rom. 11:14). Again, the problem began when the Commission made the foundation of its exegesis of Scripture the quicksand of an “unrevoked” covenant between God and Israel. This is because the Commission neither understands Scripture nor Catholic conciliar teaching.

The Commission: 38. The Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Judaism, that is the fourth article of "Nostra aetate", is located within a decidedly theological framework regarding the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and God’s unrevoked covenant with Israel. That does not mean that all theological questions which arise in the relationship of Christianity and Judaism were resolved in the text. These questions were introduced in the Declaration, but require further theological reflection. Of course, there had been earlier magisterial texts which focused on Judaism, but “Nostra aetate” (No. 4) provides the first theological overview of the relationship of the Catholic Church to the Jews.

R. Sungenis: Notice how the Commission slips in the idea that Nostra aetate 4 taught that there exists an “unrevoked covenant with Israel.” But Nostra aetate teaches no such thing. In the end, it is quite ironic how the Commission keeps referring to Nostra aetate as its authority, but it is precisely Nostra aetate that it ignores and disobeys. Here are the words of Nostra aetate 4. See if you can find any reference to an “unrevoked covenant with Israel.” While we are doing so, let us comment on some of its more salient statements:

Nostra aetate 4: As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham’s sons according to faith(6) – are included in the same Patriarch’s call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people’s Exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles. making both one in Himself.(8)
R. Sungenis: Notice here that, in opposition to the Commission, Nostra aetate refers to the Jews as “the chosen people” only in reference to the specific time they were making an exodus from Egypt. At that time the Israelites were certainly the “chosen people.” But nowhere does either Nostra aetate or any other document in Vatican II refer to the Jews of today as “the chosen people.”

We also see that Nostra aetate makes reference to “the Ancient Covenant,” but this does not tell us what specific covenant, if any, it has in view, so the phrasing is inconsequential for our purposes.

We also see that Nostra aetate makes reference to the “root” of the “olive tree” but unlike the Commission, it does not say that the “root” is Israel.

Nostra aetate 4: The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: “there is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church’s main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ’s Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

R. Sungenis: Here Nostra aetate cites Romans 9:4 with a translation using a present tense verb to fill the lacuna in the Greek, but unlike the Commission it does not conclude from this that the Jews still retain the covenants and the law, for there is no reference—not even a hint—that Nostra aetate believes there still exists an “unrevoked covenant with Israel.”

Nostra aetate 4: As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and “serve him shoulder to shoulder” (Soph. 3:9).(12)

R. Sungenis: Here Nostra aetate confirms what St. Paul teaches in Romans 11:1-23, that is, that the majority of Jews reject Christ and only a remnant receive him. Nostra aetate also understands Romans 11:28 correctly, that is, that God holds the Jews beloved not for themselves but for the sake of their Fathers to whom he made an oath (cf. Deut 9:4-11; Hebrews 6:13-18). Nostra aetate also cites Zephaniah 3:9, but wisely, it declares that such a day is “known to God alone” (cf. Matt 24:36; Hebrews 11:39-40; 2 Pet 3:1-13).

Nostra aetate 4: Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants 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.

R. Sungenis: Nostra aetate recommends what any normal person with common sense would want in this divided and conflicted world; which is the same thing St. Paul tells us in Romans 12:18: “If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all.”

Nostra aetate 4: True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ,(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive,
nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

R. Sungenis: Here Nostra aetate does not white wash the truth. It is obvious from a rational and fair reading of the Gospels that the Jewish authorities hated Jesus and wanted him dead. They incited the people against Jesus and made them cry, “Let his blood be upon us and our children.” In this Nostra aetate agrees with Scripture: “…the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men” (1Thess 2:14-15). But Nostra aetate also recognizes what every other Catholic authority has – that Jews of today are not responsible for Christ’s death anymore than the Gentiles of today are.

Nostra aetate also recognizes that it is only the Church which is “the new people of God,” not the Jews and not Israel. It only reminds us that we are not to take this truth to the extreme and make the illogical jump that Jews are accursed or that God has decided not to save any of them. Jews at large have rejected Christ by their own free will.

Let us also not fail to mention that Nostra aetate teaches us “not to teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel,” but that is precisely what the Commission has done in this document. The Commission has taught two things that Nostra aetate doesn’t teach: (1) that Israel has an exclusive and unrevoked covenant with God, and (2) that the Church at large is not to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his salvation to the Jews.

Nostra aetate 4: Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church’s preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

R. Sungenis: The “Gospel’s spiritual love” and “the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love” is ultimately the salvation provided for us by means of the death and resurrection of Christ. Ironically, because of the Commission’s refusal to preach the Gospel to the Jews and thus give them “the gifts and call of God” (Rom. 11:29), it is displaying the highest form of anti-Semitism that exists, for in the Commission’s desire to give earthly love and respect to the Jews, it has ended up giving them nothing but spiritual hatred, disrespect and ultimately judgment.

The Commission: 39. Because it was such a theological breakthrough, the Conciliar text is not infrequently over-interpreted, and things are read into it which it does not in fact contain. An important example of over-interpretation would be the following: that the covenant that God made with his people Israel perdures and is never invalidated. Although this statement is true, it cannot be explicitly read into “Nostra aetate” (No. 4). This statement was instead first made with full clarity by Saint Pope John Paul II when he said during a meeting with Jewish representatives in Mainz on 17 November
1980 that the Old Covenant had never been revoked by God: "The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God ... and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible" (No.3). The same conviction is stated also in the Catechism of the Church in 1993: “The Old Covenant has never been revoked” (121).

R. Sungenis: So then, why has the Commission consistently referred to Nostra aetate as its authority throughout this document (i.e., it does so twenty times), and thus imply that Nostra aetate is the ultimate source for its teaching that there exists an “an unrevoked covenant between God and Israel”? It is not until almost at the end of the document that the Commission finally admits that Nostra aetate does not teach that Israel has an unrevoked covenant.

But then the Commission adds insult to injury. It glosses over its theological misdirection by a single reference to John Paul II’s statement in Mainz, Germany, in 1980 in which the pope makes an uncontextualized comment: “the Old Covenant, never revoked by God,” as its one and only authority for the very essence of its paper, namely, that there exists an "unrevoked covenant between God and Israel"! Moreover, it does so without even a remote analysis of John Paul II’s statement; or an analysis of the 1993 Catechism; or of the history of John Paul II’s statements about the Old Covenant beyond his 1980 remark. This is shoddy scholarship and it is a disgrace to see it displayed before the world under the name Catholic.

Analysis of the 1993 Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraph #121

So we will do what the Commission failed to do. We will contextualize John Paul II’s statement and the statement in the 1993 Catechism. When we do we will find that neither John Paul II nor the Catechism were teaching that there exists today an unrevoked covenant between God and Israel. We will deal with the Catechism first. We do so by quoting from the context of the paragraph in question. Notice that the context of the Catechism is dealing with “The Canon of Scripture,” and not whether national Israel still has an unrevoked covenant with God:

IV. The Canon of Scripture

120 It was by the apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list of the sacred books. [90]

This complete list is called the canon of Scripture. It includes 46 books for the Old Testament (45 if we count Jeremiah and Lamentations as one) and 27 for the New.[91]

The Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Tobit, Judith, Esther, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, the Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Baruch, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi.

The New Testament: the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters of St. Paul to the Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, the Letter to the Hebrews, the Letters of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, and Jude, and Revelation (the Apocalypse).
R. Sungenis: Now we come to the paragraph in question, # 121. Notice that we are still in a context that is speaking about the Canon of Scripture, not whether the Jews have an irrevocable covenant with God.

The Old Testament

121 The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value,[92] for the Old Covenant has never been revoked.

122 Indeed, “the economy of the Old Testament was deliberately so oriented that it should prepare for and declare in prophecy the coming of Christ, redeemer of all men.”[93] “Even though they contain matters imperfect and provisional,[94] The books of the Old Testament bear witness to the whole divine pedagogy of God’s saving love: these writings “are a storehouse of sublime teaching on God and of sound wisdom on human life, as well as a wonderful treasury of prayers; in them, too, the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way.”[95]

123 Christians venerate the Old Testament as true Word of God. the Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void (Marcionism).

R. Sungenis: Notice that the whole context surrounding para. 121 is the Old Testament Scriptures. There is not one word about Israel, the Jews, or unrevoked covenants. But here is what happened. An ambiguity arose when the author of the Catechism decided to equate the Old Testament with the Old Covenant. Although the two terms can sometimes be interchanged, the allowance to do so depends on the context and what the author intends to teach. If the author intends to teach about the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, the Davidic or the New Covenant, he will not usually use the word “Testament.” But if he is teaching about the Old and New Testaments, he might refer to them also as “Covenants” in addition to “Testaments.” Apparently, that is what is happening here in para. 121, namely, the phrase “Old Covenant” has been used in place of “Old Testament.” In other words, para. 121 could easily have said:

121 The Old Testament is an indispensable part of Sacred Scripture. Its books are divinely inspired and retain a permanent value,[92] for the Old Testament has never been revoked.

If it did so, there would be no confusion, for it is a true statement that the Old Testament scriptures have not been revoked. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-18:

17"Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. 18For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

So, whatever was fulfilled has passed away, but there are many things in the Old Testament that have not been fulfilled, such as the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the world. Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 13:10-11; 65:17f; 66:1f; Daniel 8:23f; 9:27; 11:1f; 12:1-3; Zechariah 14:1f; Ezekiel 38-39 have things in them that have not yet been fulfilled and will only be fulfilled near or at the end of time. Hence, the Old Testament cannot be revoked until these events have been fulfilled.

If anyone contests this exposition and claims that the Catechism’s statement “…for the Old Covenant has never been revoked” refers to an actual and exclusive unrevoked covenant that God made with Israel, he is forced to explain why the author of the Catechism punctuated his text with a totally unrelated
doctrine; without any footnotes to explain its strange appearance; without another similar statement appearing in the entire Catechism; and one which does not even prove the point in contention. He would also be forced to explain why the Catechism does not support the concept of an “unrevoked Old Covenant between God and Israel” anywhere else in its 900 pages, and explain why an unrevoked covenant is not taught either in Nostra aetate or any other conciliar or official teaching of the Catholic Church. The only thing he would have on his side is that some unconscionable cleric decided to throw in the phrase “the Old Covenant has never been revoked” so as to cause confusion and get everyone arguing about it. He would also have on his side that the 1993 Catechism does not have one reference in its 900 pages to the Mosaic covenant being revoked, and thus the Catechism could be accused of avoiding the very clear teaching of Hebrews 7:18; 8:1-13 and 10:9; the Councils of Florence and Trent; Pius XII’s Mystici Corporis, and other authorities.

**John Paul II’s Statement Made in Mainz, Germany, November 1980**

Now let’s look at John Paul II’s statement in the speech he gave at Mainz, Germany on November 17, 1980:

> The first dimension of dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible.

Notice the pope’s last statement: “that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible.” One could safely make the argument that in this statement the context of the pope’s remark is the same as we saw in the context of paragraphs 120 to 123 of the 1993 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, that is, a context that is referring to the Bible, both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Since we commonly refer to “the first and the second part of her Bible” as the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively, the pope could have been doing the same when he used the words “Old Covenant.” In other words, an alternative translation from the German he spoke would be:

> The first dimension of dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Testament, never revoked by God, and that of the New Testament, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible.

This would make perfect sense, since the Old Testament has never been revoked and never will be revoked until the end of time. Certain covenants within the Old Testament scriptures, however, have been revoked, such as the Mosaic covenant.

But if someone were to argue that the pope used “Old Covenant” because he wanted to teach the idea that an exclusive covenant between God and Israel has never been revoked, he would have no precedent, since John Paul II never officially taught the idea before or after 1980. Moreover, a pope cannot officially teach doctrine unless he has the proper venue (e.g., an encyclical, and infallible declaration), and a speech that contains one ambiguous off-hand remark to a Jewish audience in Germany is certainly not an official teaching venue.

Another possibility is that John Paul II was referring to the spiritual part of the Abrahamic covenant when he said “the Old Covenant, never revoked by God.” This is even more likely since on November 26, 1986 this is precisely what the pope did when he gave a speech in Sydney, Australia. He put it as follows:
It will continue to be an explicit and very important part of my mission to repeat and emphasize that our attitude to the Jewish religion should be one of the greatest respect, since the Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham... for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable calling.

R. Sungenis: Notice three things here. First, the pope refers to the “Hebrew Scriptures,” which is similar to his mention of “the first part of her Bible” from the 1980 Mainz speech. Second, the pope tells us he believes it is the Abrahamic covenant that is unrevoked, which is quite correct. Third, he tells us the correct interpretation of Romans 11:29 is not the Commission’s “the irrevocable covenant between God and Israel,” but precisely as Paul teaches it, that the only thing irrevocable is the “calling,” not the covenant. In essence, the Abrahamic covenant contains the “gifts and calling.” The question remains, however, who of today’s Jews will respond to the calling as Abraham did and thereby gained his justification (cf. Romans 4:1-22; James 2:21-24; Hebrews 6:13-18; 11:8-19).

6. The Church’s mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism:

The Commission: 40. It is easy to understand that the so-called ‘mission to the Jews’ is a very delicate and sensitive matter for Jews because, in their eyes, it involves the very existence of the Jewish people. This question also proves to be awkward for Christians, because for them the universal salvific significance of Jesus Christ and consequently the universal mission of the Church are of fundamental importance. The Church is therefore obliged to view evangelisation to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views. In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews. While there is a principled rejection of an institutional Jewish mission, Christians are nonetheless called to bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ also to Jews, although they should do so in a humble and sensitive manner, acknowledging that Jews are bearers of God’s Word, and particularly in view of the great tragedy of the Shoah.

R. Sungenis: As we noted before, the Shoah should have nothing to do with how or why we preach the Gospel to the Jews. It is a totally separate issue that must be studied and evaluated on a political and historical level, not a religious one. Second, the Commission’s suggestion that the Church is to view evangelization to the Jews differently to the extent that it should not initiate “any specific institutional mission work directed toward Jews,” is wrong. First, the Church has never directed, by institutional mission work, evangelization to any particular non-Christian group. It simply preaches the Gospel to all men as was commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20. The problem is that from everything else the Commission has written in this document, including its appeal to previous late-20th century Catholic documents on the Jews, the Commission is trying to give the Vatican an excuse not to preach the Gospel to the Jews since preaching will abruptly end the dialogues. The Commission is quite aware of the fact that the Jews, by and large, have made it clear they do not want to hear about Jesus Christ, and the Church’s silencing of the Gospel is the only reason the “dialogues” have continued for the last 50 years.

The Commission: 41. The concept of mission must be presented correctly in dialogue between Jews and Christians. Christian mission has its origin in the sending of Jesus by the Father. He gives his disciples a share in this call in relation to God’s people of Israel (cf. Mt 10:6) and then as the risen Lord with
regard to all nations (cf. Mt 28:19). Thus the people of God attains a new dimension through Jesus, who calls his Church from both Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph 2:11-22) on the basis of faith in Christ and by means of baptism, through which there is incorporation into his Body which is the Church ("Lumen gentium", 14).

42. Christian mission and witness, in personal life and in proclamation, belong together. The principle that Jesus gives his disciples when he sends them out is to suffer violence rather than to inflict violence. Christians must put their trust in God, who will carry out his universal plan of salvation in ways that only he knows, for they are witnesses to Christ, but they do not themselves have to implement the salvation of humankind. Zeal for the “house of the Lord” and confident trust in the victorious deeds of God belong together. Christian mission means that all Christians, in community with the Church, confess and proclaim the historical realisation of God’s universal will for salvation in Christ Jesus (cf. "Ad gentes", 7). They experience his sacramental presence in the liturgy and make it tangible in their service to others, especially those in need.

**R. Sungenis:** The last two paragraphs are quite good. There is only one problem, which we have seen before, but it is worth pointing out again. The Commission is under the impression that the Gospel witness and the Jewish response to it is some sort of mystery that we can’t understand and thus “only God knows” how the “universal plan of salvation will be carried out.” But it is no secret. St. Paul is quite clear how it will proceed, and thus we need not be frustrated when we see the Jews at large reject the Gospel. As noted, Paul tells us that only a remnant of Jews will respond, for this was the same pattern seen in the Old Testament and in Paul’s day (see Romans 11:1-11). Additionally, there may be only be a “remnant” of Gentiles who will receive salvation, since most of the world has rejected Christ and will continue to do so (cf. Matt 7:13-14; 1Cor 1:23; Eph. 4:17; 1 Pet 4:3).

**The Commission:** 43. It is and remains a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant that it consists of Jews and Gentiles, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression. Just as after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ there were not two unrelated covenants, so too the people of the covenant of Israel are not disconnected from ‘the people of God drawn from the Gentiles’.

**R. Sungenis:** Once again we must reiterate that the Commission continues to make the error of teaching that there were two covenants after the death and resurrection of Christ—one for the Jews and one for the Church—but this is simply not the case. The only proof text the Commission provided for its thesis was the statement from John Paul II, “the Old Covenant, never revoked by God,” but we have shown, on several counts, that such is not possible. See The Commission 39.

**The Commission:** Rather, the enduring role of the covenant people of Israel in God’s plan of salvation is to relate dynamically to the ‘people of God of Jews and Gentiles, united in Christ’, he whom the Church confesses as the universal mediator of creation and salvation. In the context of God’s universal will of salvation, all people who have not yet received the gospel are aligned with the people of God of the New Covenant. “In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom 9:4-5). On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for he does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues (cf. Rom 11:28-29)” ("Lumen gentium", 16).

**R. Sungenis:** The Commission’s statement from Lumen gentium is rather significant for our purposes. Notice that Lumen gentium appears to have understood the implied past tense verbal clause of Romans 9:4, since it says that the covenants and promises to the
Jews "were given," and are not implied as a present possession of modern-day Jews.

Second, notice that it also interprets Romans 11:29 correctly, since it says God does not repent of his "gifts and call," rather than, as the Commission did in this document, turn Romans 11:29 into "the irrevocable covenant between God and Israel."

7. The goals of dialogue with Judaism

The Commission: 44. The first goal of the dialogue is to add depth to the reciprocal knowledge of Jews and Christians. One can only learn to love what one has gradually come to know, and one can only know truly and profoundly what one loves. This profound knowledge is accompanied by a mutual enrichment whereby the dialogue partners become the recipients of gifts. The Conciliar declaration "Nostra aetate" (No. 4) speaks of the rich spiritual patrimony that should be further discovered step by step through biblical and theological studies and through dialogue. To that extent, from the Christian perspective, an important goal is the mining of the spiritual treasures concealed in Judaism for Christians. In this regard one must mention above all the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. In the foreword by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the 2001 document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission “The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”, the respect of Christians for the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament is stressed. It highlights that "Christians can learn a great deal from a Jewish exegesis practised for more than 2000 years; in return Christians may hope that Jews can profit from Christian exegetical research." In the field of exegesis many Jewish and Christian scholars now work together and find their collaboration mutually fruitful precisely because they belong to different religious traditions.

R. Sungenis: There is little to disagree with in the Commission’s above paragraph, except the fact that there is no warning given to Christian exegetes to avoid the inevitable bias against Jesus Christ that Jewish exegetes will bring to Scripture. Scripture itself warns of such bias and blindness (cf. Matt 13:13-15; 2Cor 3:14; 2Pet 3:16; Rom 10:1-5; Acts 28:25-28).

The Commission: 45. This reciprocal acquiring of knowledge must not be limited to specialists alone. Therefore it is important that Catholic educational institutions, particularly in the training of priests, integrate into their curricula both "Nostra aetate" and the subsequent documents of the Holy See regarding the implementation of the Conciliar declaration. The Church is also grateful for the analogous efforts within the Jewish community. The fundamental changes in relations between Christians and Jews which were initiated by "Nostra aetate" (No. 4) must also be made known to the coming generations and be received and disseminated by them.

R. Sungenis: When they do, they should emphasize the fact that Nostra aetate does not teach the conclusions written in the Commission’s 2015 document, such as the fact that Nostra aetate does not teach that there exists a covenant between God and Israel that is unrevoked.

The Commission 46. One important goal of Jewish-Christian dialogue certainly consists in joint engagement throughout the world for justice, peace, conservation of creation, and reconciliation. In the past, it may have been that the different religions – against the background of a narrowly understood claim to truth and a corresponding intolerance – contributed to the incitement of conflict and confrontation. But today religions should not be part of the problem, but part of the solution. Only when religions engage in a successful dialogue with one another, and in that way contribute towards world peace, can this be realised also on the social and political levels. Religious freedom guaranteed by civil
authority is the prerequisite for such dialogue and peace. In this regard, the litmus-test is how religious minorities are treated, and which rights of theirs are guaranteed. In Jewish-Christian dialogue the situation of Christian communities in the state of Israel is of great relevance, since there – as nowhere else in the world – a Christian minority faces a Jewish majority. Peace in the Holy Land – lacking and constantly prayed for – plays a major role in dialogue between Jews and Christians.

R. Sungenis: The Commission’s seeking for peace and tranquility is well and good. If “dialogue” promotes peace, who can be against it? The Catholic side especially, however, needs to be very careful not to compromise its traditional doctrines. But as we have seen in the Commission’s document, the Catholic side seems bent on raising up Judaism to levels it cannot attain so that it does not hurt the feelings of the Jews with whom it “dialogues.” The Catholic side, politely and respectfully, must “agree to disagree” when the Jewish side seeks to dilute, ignore or eliminate Catholic doctrine.

The Commission: 47. Another important goal of Jewish–Catholic dialogue consists in jointly combatting all manifestations of racial discrimination against Jews and all forms of anti-Semitism, which have certainly not yet been eradicated and re-emerge in different ways in various contexts. History teaches us where even the slightest perceptible forms of anti-Semitism can lead: the human tragedy of the Shoah in which two-thirds of European Jewry were annihilated. Both faith traditions are called to maintain together an unceasing vigilance and sensitivity in the social sphere as well. Because of the strong bond of friendship between Jews and Catholics, the Catholic Church feels particularly obliged to do all that is possible with our Jewish friends to repel anti-Semitic tendencies. Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed that a Christian can never be an anti-Semite, especially because of the Jewish roots of Christianity.

R. Sungenis: Anti-semitism is certainly wrong, but so is Pro-semitism or hyper-semitism, which is the sin of curtailing or avoiding any criticism of Jews or Israel; or of automatically siding with Israel in political issues (e.g., the Palestinian conflict). It is the sin of elevating Jews to a higher status than non-Jews, or of insisting that today the Jews remain the “chosen people,” or are entitled to land by divine right. Pro-semitism also has a tendency to use the Shoah as the fulcrum upon which all “dialogue” can proceed and political decisions made, and it does so without allowing any alternative historical perspectives to be discussed19 (as noted in the fact that even to question the details of the Shoah is a crime in thirteen countries in Europe). Silencing alternative views is not “dialogue”; it is mind-control, and thus quite indicative of how the pro-semitism side wishes to conduct the so-called “peace process.” Liberal-minded Catholics, especially those in the present hierarchy whose popes have come from Jewish environments, are some of the chief promoters of pro-semitism, and in the process have put the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church at risk.

The Commission: 48. Justice and peace, however, should not simply be abstractions within dialogue, but should also be evidenced in tangible ways. The social-charitable sphere provides a rich field of activity, since both Jewish and Christian ethics include the imperative to support the poor, disadvantaged and sick. Thus, for example, the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) worked together in 2004 in Argentina during the financial crisis in that country to organise joint soup kitchens for the poor and homeless, and to enable impoverished children to attend school by providing meals for them. Most Christian

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19 Even prominent Jews have recognized this tendency, such as Norman Finkelstein’s *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, Verso, London, 2001.
churches have large charitable organisations, which likewise exist within Judaism. These would be able to work together to alleviate human need. Judaism teaches that the commandment “to walk in His ways” (Deut 11:22) requires the imitation of the Divine Attributes (Imitatio Dei) through care for the vulnerable, the poor and the suffering (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 14a). This principle accords with Jesus’ instruction to support those in need (cf. eg. Mt 25:35–46). Jews and Christians cannot simply accept poverty and human suffering; rather they must strive to overcome these problems.

49. When Jews and Christians make a joint contribution through concrete humanitarian aid for justice and peace in the world, they bear witness to the loving care of God. No longer in confrontational opposition but cooperating side by side, Jews and Christians should seek to strive for a better world. Saint Pope John Paul II called for such cooperation in his address to the Central Council of German Jewry and to the Conference of Rabbis in Mainz on 17 November 1980: “Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham, are called to be a blessing for the world ..., by committing themselves together for peace and justice among all men and peoples, with the fullness and depth that God himself intended us to have, and with the readiness for sacrifices that this goal may demand”.

**R. Sungenis:** We applaud the Catholic/Jewish dialogue for sparking such social outreaches and we pray that it will continue. The last thing we want to see in this word of plenty is impoverished people who don’t have enough to eat and are without a roof over their heads. Such corporal works of mercy have been the mainstay of Catholic outreach to the world for centuries. If the Church can engage the Jews for help in this endeavor, so be it. But the Catholic side needs to stop diluting its doctrine as an incentive to get Jews involved.

Robert Sungenis, Sungenis@aol.com
Appendix 1

Beginning in the early 20th century, Jewish/Zionistic influence has seeped into the highest echelons of the Church. It reached a peak in the early 1960s at Vatican Council II.

The front cover of LOOK magazine from January 25, 1966 has the cover story "How the Jews Changed Catholic Thinking." This was published shortly after the close of Vatican II. As de Poncins puts it,

...a bomb exploded on 25th January 1966, for on that date an American review published...the role of Cardinal Bea and the world Jewish organizations in Vatican Council II.20

In his book, Le Problème Juif face au Concile, de Poncins spoke out against Jewish historian Jules Isaac's claim that the Jews are "the people of the Old Testament" by suggesting that the Jews do now want a Messiah, but "a terrestrial reign in which they will control the social, economic and political life of the nations."

The LOOK article was bylined by senior editor, Joseph Roddy, who, between barbs aimed at Catholics who wanted to maintain the tradition, reveals that "secret" discussions were held between Cardinal Bea and the leaders of B’nai B’rith and the American Jewish Congress.21 Most of Roddy’s article deals with the issue of how the Church handled the deicide charge against the Jews. If the deicide charge were to be lifted, then the connected charge (that the Jews were cursed because of deicide) would also be lifted. The Jews were pushing for a complete exoneration of all Jews, then and now, in the death of Christ.

In the end the Council decided that only the Jewish leaders of the first century and their followers were instrumental in murdering Christ, and thus a "curse" for deicide could not be applied to the Jewish people at large. But the problem was not so much what Vatican II concluded (since neither Scripture nor any official Catholic doctrine had ever blamed all Jews for murdering Christ, but only that Jewry would suffer the divine and human repercussions of their ancestors’ evil act). The problem was the political machinations that proceeded out of the Council once it made its declaration. The Council's position was made to appear as a

20 Leon de Poncins, Judaism and the Vatican, p. 167.
21 “…on March 31, 1963, when a limousine was waiting for him [Bea] outside the Hotel Plaza in New York. The ride ended about six blocks away, outside the offices of the American Jewish Committee. There, a latter-day Sanhedrin was waiting to greet the head of the Secretariat for Christian Unity. The gathering was kept secret from the press” (LOOK, Jan. 25, 1966, p. 20).
22 Pictures and captions of Bea, Heschel and Isaac from LOOK.
dramatic shift away from previous Catholic tradition and sentiment. The deicide clarification was interpreted as a sign of a near total reversal of Catholic teaching on the Jews.

With that came a whole host of new but dubious aftershocks. For example, Roddy reports that Rabbi Heschel, in a meeting with Cardinal Bea, requested to have Vatican II state that Jews would no longer be proselytized for conversion to the Christian faith. This showed that, tied in with the lifting of deicide was the more significant desire to make the Jewish religion a legitimate and independent faith in the eyes of the Catholic Church. This led to another issue—whether the Jews retained their Old Covenant.

There was a virtual war among Vatican II’s leading bishops regarding the status of the Jews. As is always the case, liberals and conservatives were in battle. Roddy, favoring the liberals, highlights the 1947 book, Jésus et Israël by Jules Isaac. He reveals that it had a great influence on various Council bishops. De Poncins affirms this stating: “Jules Isaac received strong support from priests even in Rome.” Roddy notes that Isaac also had a private talk with Pope John XXIII who is said to have assured him that “anti-semitic” elements would be dealt with. Conservatives were very wary. Archbishop Charles de Provenchères concluded some years later: “It is a sign of the times that a layman – and a Jewish layman at that – has become the originator of a Council decree.”

He was referring to Jules Isaac.

The Jewish Chronicle said much the same:

Professor Isaac, a distinguished French-Jewish historian...devoted the last years of his life to a study of the religious roots of anti-Semitism. He had audiences with the late Popes Pius XII and John XXIII, the latter being of considerable importance and leading to subsequent emendation of certain passages offensive to Jews in the Roman liturgy.

Isaac claimed that the Catholic Church’s understanding of the Jews for the last two thousand years had been prejudicial and distorted, and that, in reality, the Jews were not under the judgment of God. The Diaspora was merely the result of “Roman imperialism,” not a loss of faith among the Jews. He writes:

...the permanent and latent source of anti-Semitism is none other than Christian religious teaching of every description, and the traditional, tendentious, interpretation of the Scriptures.

Isaac insisted that the four Gospel writers told falsehoods about the Jews because they were “preoccupied with reducing Roman responsibility to the minimum in order correspondingly to increase that of the Jews.” Isaac had a special hostility to St. Matthew for making the Jews appear the worst. He writes:

It is a veritable competition as to who can make the Jews appear most hateful. Richly chequered and pathetic as is the narrator of the fourth Gospel (St. John), the palm goes to Matthew; his unerring hand unleashed the poisoned arrow that can never be withdrawn.

On page after page Isaac uses the refrain, “It is hard to believe...” that anything the Gospel writers say, especially about the Passion, is actually true. He creates a constant barrage of accusations of “anti-semitism” against the evangelists, even though Isaac admits that the one evangelist who he thought was least anti-semitic was St. Luke, the only Gentile. In

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25 Jésus et Israël, p. 572.

26 bid., p. 483.
another work, Isaac pointed his finger at the Fathers of the Church and their teachings about the Jews:

One must recognize the sad fact that nearly all the Church Fathers have contributed their stone in this work of moral lapidation: St. Hilary, St. Jerome, St. Ephrem, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Ambrose and St. Epiphany – who was born a Jew – St. Cyril of Jerusalem, and many others. But two of this illustrious cohort...deserve special attention, St. John Chrysostom, especially St. John Chrysostom and...St. Augustine.

Of Pope St. Gregory the Great, Isaac said:

He [Gregory] envisaged the history of this people as an enormous error” and did so because he “could only follow the existing tradition, firmly established by the Fathers of the fourth century.27

Isaac’s book heavily influenced Karol Wojtyla, especially at Vatican II where Wojtyla was the definitive spokesman for the cause of the Jews. So strong was Isaac’s influence that it would soon develop into support for Israel to regain the land of Palestine. As Darcy O’Brien tells it in The Hidden Pope:

Isaac’s ideas were in the front of....mind when he began his behind-the-scenes efforts to reassure the Israeli government that John Paul II endorsed the right of Jews to return to the Holy Land without having to convert to Christianity. The issue that had kept Nostra aetate a limited document was that it scrupulously avoided mentioning the State of Israel or the Land. But Isaac’s impeccable scholarship had demolished the entire basis for the long-held Christian belief that the Jewish Diaspora was punishment. In

short, Isaac succeeded in overturning two-thousand years of Catholic teaching on why the Jews were no longer in Israel. It was not a judgment of God for their sins, but “a matter of politics and militarism” due to “Roman imperialism.”28

O’Brien goes on to call those at Vatican II who were against the establishment of an Israeli state as “Catholic right-wingers, Arabs, or both, no one knew.” Regarding the matter of conversion, O’Brien interprets the one statement in Nostra aetate 4 referring to the Church’s responsibility to convert the Jews29 as

...bowing to conservative pressures, drafters of the statement on the Jews at one point included a passage praying for Jewish conversion. An exasperated Rabbi Heschel, who traveled from New York to Rome several times to lobby for a strong statement and had an audience with Paul VI, told his friend Johannes Cardinal Willebrands that a prayer for conversion would vitiate any statement...If a plea for conversion was in fact included, the rabbit told the cardinal, he would personally travel to Auschwitz and gas himself.30

The conservatives had their guns as well. Roddy notes that “some agency close enough to the Vatican to have the addresses in Rome of the Council’s 2,200 visiting cardinals and bishops, supplied each with a 900-page book, Il Complotto contro la Chiesa (“The Plot

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29 “It is, therefore, the burden of the Church’s preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows” (NA 4).
30 The Hidden Pope, p. 308.
Against the Church”), which asserted that the Church was ‘being infiltrated by Jews.”

The Jewish, Freemasonic and Communist plotters now have the intention at the coming Council of utilising, as they assert, the lack of knowledge of most clergy concerning the true history of the Church, to execute a surprise coup by adopting the standpoint at the assembled Holy Ecumenical Council that anti-Semitism must be condemned, as well as every struggle against the Jews who, as we will elaborate, are the wirepullers of Freemasonry and of international Communism. They would like the infamous Jews, whom the Church has regarded as evil for the course of nineteen centuries, to be declared good and beloved of God. As a result, the “unanimis consensus Patrum” would be contradicted, which laid down exactly the opposite, as well as what also found its expression through various Papal Bulls and Canons of Ecumenical as well as Provincial Councils.

The war was on. Perhaps the victor, if any, would be the Jews, for, although they did not succeed in changing official Catholic teaching, they did succeed in giving the impression it was changed. In the years to come, Jewish groups would continue to apply pressure on Catholic churches, universities, seminaries and even the Vatican curia. As a result Catholic clergy and lay theologians began to reverse two millennia of Church teaching. They made four main assertions: (1) the Jews retained their Old Covenant and were still the Chosen People; (2) God had great plans for the Jews irrespective of the Catholic Church; (3) Jews should not be proselytized into the Church; and (4) the Jews were entitled to the land of Palestine.

As Roddy reports, although Paul VI “did not agree” when Rabbi Heschel began “to press for a declaration in which Catholics would be forbidden to proselytize Jews,” the mood began to change somewhat under John Paul II. The American clergy led the way. In 1988 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wrote a paper on Catholic liturgy and Jewish seder meals. In it the USCCB submits fourteen departures from previous Catholic doctrine:

1. Judaism is a viable and valid religion that has high spiritual values on par with Christianity (even though it rejects Jesus Christ).

2. Supersessionism (the doctrine that says the Old Covenant with Moses was superseded and replaced by the New Covenant in Jesus Christ) is no longer acceptable.

3. Supersessionism was rejected by Vatican II in both Nostra Aetate and Dei Verbum (yet without the USCCB providing citations to prove its point from either document).

4. Since the Jews still have a separate covenant with God, the “Sinai covenant,” they also have a mission with Christians to bring in the “kingdom of God.” Christians and Jews must work together in this “mission” since they both believe in the “One God and Lord of history.”

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31 The Plot Against the Church, at http://www.catholicvoice.co.uk/pinay. Some chapter headings are: Chapter Two: The Jews as Founders of Freemasonry; Chapter Six: Freemasonry Favors and Spreads Communism, Which Is a Jewish Creation; Part Three: The Synagogue of Satan; Chapter Five: Antisemitism and Christianity; Chapter Six: Christ Our Lord, the Symbol of Antisemitism, So the Jews Assert; Chapter Eight: The Apostles Condemn the Jews for the Murder of Christ; Chapter Ten: The Jews Kill the Christians and Persecute the Apostles; Part Four: The “Jewish Fifth Column” in the Clergy; Chapter One: The Octopus Strangling Christianity; Chapter Two: The Origin of the “Fifth Column” (Jewish Infiltration of the Roman Catholic Church); Chapter Seven: Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Ambrose Condemn the Jews.

32 The Plot Against the Church, Introduction to the Italian edition.
5. The New Testament was edited by late first century Christians who had animosity toward the Jews. These Christians added “anti-semitic” statements, such as “let His blood be upon us and our children,” to St. Matthew’s Gospel, and many other such statements unfavorable to the Jews.

6. The New Testament was also edited by various Jews who, because they were over scrupulous, incorrectly described the Jews with terms such as hardheartedness, blindness, legalism, materialism, rejection of Jesus, etc.

7. The addition of these negative statements toward the Jews caused anti-semitism to spread over the world, and resulted in things like the murder of Jews during World War II. The Jews themselves have done nothing significant to cause “anti-semitism.”

8. Because Christians edited Scripture and made false statements about the Jews, the Church now needs to reconcile with the Jews. By such reconciliation we are following Jesus’ command to “love our neighbor.” The reconciliation can be accomplished by the Catholic homilist toning down Scripture’s negativism toward Jews; and inviting Jewish “holocaust” survivors to preach in Catholic churches about the dangers of anti-semitism.

9. The Pharisees were teaching the same things Jesus taught; the Pharisees were not really at odds with Jesus, as is portrayed in the New Testament.

10. Jesus’ interpretation of biblical law is similar to that found in the Talmud (a Jewish book of the seventh century AD that says Christ was a fraud and is in hell boiling in excrement and the Virgin Mary was a whore).

11. The Jews had little or nothing to do with causing the death of Christ; all people are guilty of causing His death.

12. Catholic homilists should consult rabbinic, medieval and modern Jewish sources for alternative interpretations of Scripture.

13. Scripture often has a dual interpretation, allowing for distinct Jewish and Catholic viewpoints. It is not necessary for Jews to see Christ prophesied in the Old Testament.

14. The Jews have a common belief and interest with Christians since both groups are looking for the return of the Messiah (even though Jews do not believe that the Messiah who is coming is Jesus Christ).

The fourteen points of the 1988 USCCB document represented the new Jewish apologetic in popular Catholic teaching. With little backlash from the parishioners (who had already been beaten down with accusations of “anti-semitism” since the end of World War II), soon high-placed cardinals were endorsing the new apologetic. Walter Cardinal Kasper of Germany set the pace when he stated to the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee in New York on May 1, 2001:

The old theory of substitution [i.e., that the New Covenant replaced the Old Covenant] is gone since the Second Vatican Council. For us Christians today the covenant with the Jewish people is a living heritage, a living reality.... Therefore, the Church believes that Judaism, i.e., the faithful response of the Jewish people to God’s irrevocable covenant, is salvific for them, because God is faithful to His promises....Thus mission, in this strict sense, cannot be used with regard to Jews, who believe in the true and one God. Therefore – and this is characteristic – there does not exist any Catholic missionary organization for Jews. There is dialogue with Jews; no mission in this proper sense of the word towards them.

Next, William Cardinal Keeler and the USCCB, along with prominent Jewish rabbis, co-
authored the 2002 document *Reflections on Covenant and Mission*. One of the more alarming assertions of the document was:

...while the Catholic Church regards the saving act of Christ as central to the process of human salvation for all, it also acknowledges that Jews already dwell in a saving covenant with God....Campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church.

Francis Cardinal George of Chicago added:

...the Church has also sinned against the Jewish people, first of all, in teaching that God’s covenant with Israel is no longer valid for them.33

The late John Cardinal O’Connor told Ted Koppel on *Nightline* that a young man who recently left the Catholic faith for Judaism was doing the right thing. He stated: “He doesn’t need it, but he has my blessing, if we’re going to call it such, because I believe that’s what the Church teaches...Christ came into the world as a Jew. We believe He was the Son of God. But He came for everybody.”

In 1992, Johannes Cardinal Willebrands wrote the book, *The Church and the Jewish People*, siding with Jules Isaac’s viewpoint. John Paul II then appointed Willebrands as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, stating:

“Your work for Jewish-Christian harmony is most important.” Willebrands’ advocated against converting the Jews. He was once asked “how it can be possible that the Church no longer advocates conversion of the Jews after centuries of the opposite doctrine and numerous efforts during various periods at forced conversions? He draws himself up with visible exasperation and vehemently states, ‘To proselytize is not an attitude of love, nor is it one of knowledge!...As for the Jews, God made a promise to them, and God does not go back on His promises.’”34

In November 2001, the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC), under then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, issued a 210-page report titled: “The Jewish People and the Holy Scriptures in the Christian Bible,” which, among other things, stated: “…the Jewish messianic wait is not in vain,” adding that Jews and Christians share their wait for the Messiah, as Jews are waiting for the first coming and Christians for the second. The PBC profusely apologized to the Jewish people for ‘anti-Semitic passages’ contained in the New Testament, and also stressed the continuing importance of the Torah for both Jews and Christians.

**Appendix 2**

Article in *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2015:

“The Catholic Church, under Pope Francis, is attempting to cure Western civilization of the illness that it caused. If Jews can be understood by the Catholic Church as having their independent religious integrity, wholly deserving of respect, so can other faiths. Of particular moment for the United States, perhaps, is the way this positive regard must decidedly extend to Islam, which, in the words of *Nostra aetate*, ‘the Church regards with esteem.’”35

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The Jews for Jesus organization has denounced the Vatican for saying that the Catholic Church must not try to convert Jews to Christianity.

David Brickner, executive director of Jews for Jesus, said in a statement issued Friday that his organization finds the position...

egregious, especially coming from an institution which seeks to represent a significant number of Christians in the world.

The pronouncement against converting Jews came in a major document released Thursday by the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. It was issued to mark the 50th anniversary of Nostra aetate, a declaration promulgated in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council that opened the door to formal Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

The new Vatican document, titled ”The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable,” discussed at length how Christianity is rooted in Judaism. Because of this, it said, the Church is obliged to view evangelization to Jews, who believe in the one God, in a different manner from that to people of other religions and world views.

It added,

In concrete terms this means that the Catholic Church neither conducts nor supports any specific institutional mission work directed towards Jews.

Brickner accused the Vatican of pandering to Jewish leaders.

How can the Vatican ignore the fact that the Great Commission of Jesus Christ mandates that his followers are to bring the gospel to all people? Are they merely pandering to some leaders in the Jewish community who applaud being off the radar for evangelization by Catholics? If so, they need to be reminded that they first received that gospel message from the lips of Jews who were for Jesus.

Jews for Jesus, which calls itself the “largest Jewish mission agency in the world,” has branches in 13 countries and 25 cities.

Appendix 4

“Wiesenthal Center Applauds Vatican’s New Position That, Contrary To The New Testament, Jews Not Need to Accept Jesus Christ for Salvation”

December 17, 2015 by SkyWatch Editor

“Wiesenthal Center applauds Vatican’s statement on the divine covenant with the Jewish people”

December 14, 2015

The Simon Wiesenthal Center applauds a new Vatican document that instructs Catholics not to target Jews for conversion, affirms G-d’s continued covenant with the Jewish people, and asks Catholics to work with Jews to eradicate anti-Semitism.

“The sentiments expressed by Pope Francis come at a time of unprecedented anti-Semitism, especially across Europe. His Holiness has added a new pillar for interfaith relations begun 50 years ago with Nostra Aetate, and strengthened by every pope that followed. We offer our profound thanks and appreciation to His Holiness,” said Center officials.

Nostra Aetate, a product of the Second Vatican Council and the urging of Pope John

XXIII, argued that Jews could not be collectively guilty for the crucifixion, and declared anti-Semitism a sin. Pope Paul VI created much of the implementation for the findings of that watershed document. Pope John Paul II called Jews the “elder brother” of Christians, was the first to walk from the throne of St. Peter to the Rome synagogue, and asked G-d’s forgiveness at the Western Wall in Jerusalem for the Church’s mistreatment of Jews through the centuries. Pope Benedict authored much of the theological support for the thrust of Nostra Aetate. Today’s announcement follows on the heels of several other important contributions by Pope Francis, including one that spoke of what Christians can learn from Jews (“God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and to bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with his word”), and a recent statement that “To attack Jews is anti-Semitism, but an outright attack on the State of Israel is also anti-Semitism.”

“This remarkable document from the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations with Jews will affect not only the 1.25 billion Catholics world-wide, but serve as a lodestar to other Christians,” said Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein, the Center’s director of interfaith affairs. “Some church groups are working, at the urging of Palestinians, to reintroduce Replacement Theology that demeans Jews and Judaism, and severs any connection of Jews with their land. The Pope has moved in the opposite direction, to affirm biblical covenants with Jews, and to remind Christians of their roots in Judaism. It is an historic move,” he added.

Recently, ambassadors from 20 nations joined Rome’s Chief Rabbi, Cardinal Kurt Koch, and others for the opening of the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s historical exhibition People, Book, Land: The 3,500-Year Relationship of the Jewish People and The Holy Land, at the Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome. The exhibit (seen in the accompanying photo) can be seen through

December 18, 2015. Rabbi Adlerstein said that the exhibit could never have happened without Nostra Aetate and the steps that followed.

Last year, the Center’s Dean, Rabbi Marvin Hier, told the Pope that the Wiesenthal Center was actively reciprocating his generosity of spirit by taking a leadership position in the struggle to protect persecuted Christians in places like Nigeria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is one of the largest international Jewish human rights organizations with over 400,000 member families in the United States. It is an NGO at international agencies including the United Nations, UNESCO, the OSCE, the OAS, the Council of Europe and the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino).

Contact

Avra Shapiro
avra@wiesenthal.com

Marcial Lavina
mlavina@wiesenthal.com

37 See more at: http://pressreleases.religionnews.com/2015/12/14/wiesenthal-center-applauds-vaticans-statement-on-the-divine-covenant-with-the-jewish-people/#sthash.0xv4arxE.dpuf