

Go Forth and Don't Preach the Gospel?

Catholic indifference to the evangelization of the Jews means many end up in Messianic Judaism or Protestant sects.

by Roy Schoeman

Do Jews need Jesus Christ and the sacraments of the Catholic Church? For most of the 2000-year history of the Church, even asking this question would have appeared ridiculous, and the answer would have been a resounding "yes." But today the answer given by some churchmen is at best ambiguous.

Long desirous of overturning the perceived "triumphalism" of the Church's claim to be the sole means of salvation, some Catholic theologians argue that the Jewish means of salvation are still in effect, and therefore Jews have no need of Christianity. They claim that Jesus came to bring Christianity to the Gentiles as a way of making available to non-Jews what the Jews already had.

This has come to be known as the "dual covenant" theory, since it asserts that both covenants—that of the Old Testament and that of the New—remain in effect. At a 2001 meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, Cardinal Walter Kasper claimed that this dual covenant theory is now the teaching of the Church: "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." This claim was repeated in an August 2001 document issued by the U.S. Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission": "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."

It is impossible to reconcile this dual covenant theory with either Catholic dogma, or with the words of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. The fact that Jesus came for the Jews is clear from both his words and his actions: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt

and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (Jn 6:53).

The question in the early Church was not whether Christianity applied to the Jews. The question was whether it applied *only* to the Jews. This debate necessitated the calling of the first



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■ Despite indifferentism within the Church, some Jews do convert to Catholicism, such as political reporter Robert Novak pictured above. He is addressing journalists at the annual Catholic Press Association convention in Chicago in 1999.

15:24); "Go nowhere among the Gentiles . . . but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:5-6). So is the fact that the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion are necessary for Jews as well as Gentiles. For it was to Jews that he said "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 2:5), and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man

Church Council in 51 A.D described in Acts 15.

Indifferentism discourages Jewish interest in the Church

The dual covenant theory has become the latest arrow in the quiver of the indifferentists to stop the evangelization of Jews. In fact, when Jews on

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their own express an interest in entering the Church, it is not unknown for them to receive the response: "There is no need to; all God wants is for you to be a good Jew." I myself received this response—from the abbot of a Carmelite monastery!

Because of this indifference within the Catholic Church to the evangelization of the Jews, the vast majority of Jews who come to faith in Jesus miss the ultimate fulfillment of Judaism in Catholicism, and end up in Messianic Judaism or Protestant denominations.

The number of such conversions is dramatic, and perhaps unprecedented since Apostolic times. Before 1967, there were only a few thousand Messianic Jews in the U.S., and at most four or five Messianic Jewish synagogues. By the mid 1970s, *Time* magazine placed the number of Messianic Jews in the U.S. at over 50,000; by 1993 this number had grown to 160,000 in the U.S. and about 350,000 worldwide (1989 estimate). There are currently over 400 Messianic synagogues worldwide, with at least 150 in the U.S.

Of particular interest is the spread of Messianic Judaism in Israel itself. Despite official opposition, there is now practically no town or city in Israel without a "Messianic Jewish" congregation, and over 5000 Jewish converts to Christianity in Israel. This cannot help but call to mind Jesus' prophecy, when he sent his apostles out on their mission to evangelize:

[Go] to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." . . . When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes. (Mt 10:6-7,23)

It is precisely these eschatological implications that are at the heart of the interest in evangelizing the Jews, and, if spiritual warfare is at play, perhaps at the heart of some parties' efforts to do everything possible to thwart such evangelization. The Catholic Church has always believed that the Second Coming will be shortly preceded by a large-scale conversion of the Jews, as

the Catechism of the Catholic Church states (CCC #674):

The glorious Messiah's coming is suspended at every moment of history until his recognition by "all Israel," for "a hardening has come upon part of Israel" in their "unbelief" toward Jesus. (Rom 11:20-26; cf. Mt 23:39.) . . . The "full inclusion" of the Jews in the Messiah's salvation, in the wake of "the full number of the Gentiles," (Rom 11:12, 25; cf. Lk 21:24.) will enable the People of God to achieve "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," in which "God may be all in all." (Eph 4:13; 1 Cor 15:28.)

Jewish converts to Catholicism

Given the absence of activity on the part of the Church to evangelize Jews,

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when it does happen it must be the result of direct supernatural intervention. This is illustrated by the sixteen stories of Jewish conversion to the Catholic Church that appear in a book I have done for Ignatius Press, *Honey from the Rock*.

The conversion stories include: a rabbi who had a vision of Jesus while presiding over the Jewish High Holiday services; a Hasidic Jew who was sitting in a church in New York when the image of Jesus in a stained glass window came alive and spoke to him; a doctoral student for whom the face of Christ in a tapestry came alive; an executive who, while pondering the meaning of life in his office at IBM, had a vision of heaven and Jesus; and an agnostic Harvard professor who, while out walking, suddenly found himself in the presence of Christ, looking over his life as though after death. All the conversions in the book are the result of

dramatic interventions by God, usually in response to no more than a heart-felt plea to know the truth.

There have also been a number of high-profile Jews who have entered the Church in recent years. These include the most notorious abortionist of our time, Bernard Nathanson, a cofounder of NARAL who personally performed over 5000 abortions, including that of his own child, as well as overseeing tens of thousands of others; Mark Belnick, the top in-house lawyer at Tyco, who was awarded a \$12 million bonus before being indicted when the company collapsed; Larry Kudlow, one of the leading economists in the country who hosts a primetime CNBC economic news show; and Robert Novak, the prominent conservative columnist and television commentator.

The Church's newfound respect and esteem for Judaism must not deter it from the divine charter of the Great Commission, to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19)—certainly including the Jews. Even in the absence of organized efforts at evangelization, there is always prayer, which in the end is the most powerful means of evangelization of all. Pope Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, expressed his great love for the Jewish people in a beautiful prayer for their conversion:

Let us pray that [God] may grant also to the children of Israel a deeper knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, who is their son, and the gift they have made to us. Since we are both awaiting the final redemption, let us pray that the paths we follow may converge.

May all Catholics join him in that prayer. ■

ROY SCHOEMAN is a Jewish convert to the Catholic faith, and the author of *Salvation is from the Jews: The Role of Judaism in Salvation History from Abraham to the Second Coming* (Ignatius 2003), and *Honey from the Rock: Sixteen Jews Find the Sweetness of Christ* (Ignatius 2007). More information on his books, and on Jewish conversion to the Catholic Church in general, may be found at his website salvationisfromthejews.com.