

September 5, 2007

Most Reverend Cardinal William J. Levada, Prefect
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
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Your Excellency,

Greetings in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May I beg your indulgence to consider a very important and disturbing development in the catechetical teaching of parishioners in the United States that desperately needs your intervention and remedy.

The issue concerns the recently published *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* published under the auspices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2006 (ISBN-13: 978-1-57455-450-2). According to the inside cover page, this catechism does not contain an imprimatur from the Holy See but has received only a “recognitio,” although I am uncertain precisely what the term “recognitio” means or how much authority it gives to this particular catechism. My inkling is that the catechism has only been recognized as published and distributed by the USCCB but that its doctrinal content has not received any official approval from Rome.

The specific matter at hand regards page 131 wherein the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* contains the following paragraph:

The Catholic Church also acknowledges her special relationship to the Jewish people. The Second Vatican Council declared that ‘this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor the calls he issues’. When God called Abraham out of Ur, he promised to make of him a ‘great nation’. This began the history of God’s revealing his divine plan of salvation to a chosen people with whom he made enduring covenants. Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them. At the same time, ‘remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, by solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she (the Church) deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.’

Above you will see the underlined sentence in which the catechism says: “the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them.” Although I have great respect both for the USCCB and the catechism it produced for the

benefit of Catholic adults, it seems that the above sentence is one instance in which the adult audience is being taught an erroneous, if not heretical, doctrine. I implore you to examine it, and if you are in agreement, to use your authority to have it excised out of any future editions of the catechism as well as having a warning put out by the USCCB on all present editions.

Below I will cite passages from Scripture, statements from the Fathers in consensus, official dogmatic statements by the Catholic magisterium, and recent statements from Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) that are diametrically opposed to the position of the United States catechism on this issue.

First, allow me to indicate what I believe the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* is saying by the statement: “the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them.”

1) Since the catechism is specifying the name of “Moses,” it is compelling us to believe that the covenant specifically given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai and Mt. Horeb, respectively (as referenced in Exodus 20f; Deuteronomy 5ff) is still valid and functional for the Jews today. The giving of such status to the Mosaic code would also mean that, not only the moral code, but also the ceremonial and civil codes of the ancient nation of Israel are still valid and applicable for the Jews today.

2) The word “valid” is commonly used as a legal term, as in, for example, a person possessing a “valid driver’s license” or a “valid marriage license.” Hence, to say that the Mosaic covenant remains “valid” for the Jews would denote that the Mosaic covenant still has legal force for the Jewish people today. Moreover, viewing the Mosaic covenant today as legally valid means it was never legally revoked. As such, the Jews would be required to obey every legal stipulation in the Mosaic covenant under pain of death. In other words, if the Mosaic code is legally binding today, the Jew would not be able to take from the Mosaic covenant what was beneficial and leave the rest. If the Mosaic covenant is legally valid, then all of it is valid, and all of it is binding.

3) If, on the other hand, in saying that the covenant through Moses remains eternally valid for the Jews the U.S. Catechism is referring merely to the prerogative to take moral and ethical principles from the law of Moses for use in daily living, then there is no need for the U.S. Catechism to single out the Jews for this privilege, since the Church herself believes that various principles of the Mosaic covenant are beneficial for everyone (e.g., the Ten Commandments and the Church’s commentary that appear in the catechism of John Paul II in 1994). Hence, since the U.S. catechism made it a point to single out the Jews (as opposed to Gentiles) as being the recipients and practitioners of the Mosaic covenant, it seems that the catechism is attempting to make the Mosaic covenant the exclusive possession of the Jews as opposed to all people at large.

4) Another indication that the U.S. Catechism's intent is to teach that the Mosaic covenant is the legal possession of the Jews is the choice of the word "remains." The word "remains" necessitates that the covenant through Moses was valid in the past and now "remains" valid in the present and future. That being the case, it means that the Mosaic covenant has not changed today from the legal status it had for the Jews in the past.

5) Another problem is the U.S. Catechism's choice of the word "eternally." To my knowledge, the U.S. Catechism is the first Catholic document to use such terminology in reference to the Mosaic covenant. In contrast, below we will see that Cardinal Ratzinger refers to the Mosaic covenant as "transitory" and "conditional," words that are the exact opposite in meaning to "eternally." In brief, "eternally" denotes a status for the Mosaic covenant that puts it on par with the New Covenant, since the New Covenant is commonly described in Catholic documents as an "eternal covenant" (e.g., John Paul II in *Mulieris Dignitatem*, V, 11: "At the beginning of the New Covenant, which is to be eternal and irrevocable"). Hence it seems as if the U.S. Catechism is trying to make room for two eternal covenants: one eternal covenant tied to Moses exclusively for the Jews, and another eternal covenant tied to the New Covenant for non-Jews. Also implied in the use of "eternally" is the idea that the covenant through Moses will perpetuate into eternity, beyond the confines of this earth, thus giving an eternal status to the Jews that is eternally distinct from that of non-Jews.

Unless I am misunderstanding the words or the intent of the United States Catechism, I do not see any other conclusions that can be made.

As I said above, Scripture, the Fathers in consensus, the Catholic Magisterium and our beloved cardinal, now pope, have stated quite clearly that the position espoused in the U.S. Catechism regarding the Mosaic covenant is erroneous, if not heretical.

Scripture:

Please note the underlined sentences:

Hebrews 7:18-19: On the one hand, a former commandment is annulled because of its weakness and uselessness, for the law brought nothing to perfection; on the other hand, a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God. (New American Bible)

Hebrews 8:7-8: For if that first covenant had been faultless, no place would have been sought for a second one. But he finds fault with them and says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will conclude a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (NAB)

Hebrews 10:9: Then he says, "Behold, I come to do your will." He takes away the first to establish the second. (NAB)

2Cor 3:14-16: Rather, their thoughts were rendered dull, for to this present day the same veil remains unlifted when they read the old covenant, because through Christ it is taken away. To this day, in fact, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed. (NAB)

Gal 3:10-11: For all who depend on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not persevere in doing all the things written in the book of the law." And that no one is justified before God by the law is clear, for "the one who is righteous by faith will live." (NAB)

Gal 5:3-4: Once again I declare to every man who has himself circumcised that he is bound to observe the entire law. You are separated from Christ, you who are trying to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (NAB)

These are just a few of the passages that tell us plainly that the covenant made with Moses was legally abolished and replaced by the New Covenant. In fact, some of the strongest words available in the Greek language are chosen by the Holy Spirit to confirm this truth (e.g., Heb 7:18: "is annulled," Greek: ajqevthsiV; Heb 10:9: "takes away," Greek ajnairei:). Consequently, the epistle to the Galatians, as you will note above, tells us that those who depend on the law of Moses for a covenant of salvation have put themselves under a curse, for the law cannot justify anyone without the grace of Christ.

The Catholic Magisterium:

The Church has also issued similar condemnations, especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent:

Council of Florence: It firmly believes, professes, and teaches that the matter pertaining to the law of the Old Testament, of the Mosiac law, which are divided into ceremonies, sacred rites, sacrifices, and sacraments, because they were established to signify something in the future, 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; and that whoever, even after the passion, placed hope in these matters of the law and submitted himself to them as necessary for salvation, as if faith in Christ could not save without them, sinned mortally. Yet it does not deny that after the passion of Christ up to the promulgation of the Gospel they could have

been observed until they were believed to be in no way necessary for salvation; but after the promulgation of the Gospel it asserts that they cannot be observed without the loss of eternal salvation. All, therefore, who after that time observe circumcision and the Sabbath and the other requirements of the law, it declares alien to the Christian faith and not in the least fit to participate in eternal salvation, unless someday they recover from these errors (Denz. 712).

Council of Florence: For those of the Old Law did not effect grace, but only pronounced that it should be given through the passion of Christ; these sacraments of ours contain grace, and confer it upon those who receive them worthily (Denz. 695).

Council of Trent: Session 6, Canon 1: If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done either by his own natural powers, or through the teaching of the Law, and without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema (Denz. 811).

Council of Trent: Session 6, Chapter 1: The holy Synod decrees first that for a correct and sound understanding of the doctrine of justification it is necessary that each one recognize and confess that, whereas all men had lost their innocence in the prevarication of Adam, “having become unclean”, and (as the Apostle says), “by nature children of wrath”, as it (the Synod) has set forth in the decree on original sin, to that extent were they the servants of sin, and under the power of the devil and of death, that not only the gentiles by the force of nature, but not even the Jews by the very letter of the law of Moses were able to be liberated or to rise therefrom, although free will was not extinguished in them, however weakened and debased in its powers (Denz. 793).

In addition, it has been the understanding of traditional catechisms, namely the catechism issued by Pope Pius V, otherwise known as ***The Catechism of the Council of Trent***, that the Mosaic covenant has been abrogated:

But, lest the people, aware of the abrogation of the Mosaic Law, may imagine that the precepts of the Decalogue are no longer obligatory, it should be taught that when God gave the Law to Moses, He did not so much establish a new code, as render more luminous that divine light by which the depraved morals and long-continued perversity of man had at that time almost obscured. It is most certain that we are not bound to obey the Commandments because they were delivered by Moses, but because they are implanted in the hearts of all, and have been explained and confirmed by Christ our Lord.

Another confirmation of the abrogation of the Mosaic Law is **Pope Pius XII in *Mystici Corporis***, para. 29:

And first of all, by the death of our Redeemer, the New Testament took the place of the Old Law which had been abolished; then the Law of Christ together with its mysteries, enactments, institutions, and sacred rites was ratified for the whole world in the blood of Jesus Christ. For, while our Divine Savior was preaching in a restricted area - He was not sent but to the sheep that were lost of the House of Israel - the Law and the Gospel were together in force; 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, establishing the New Testament in His blood shed for the whole human race. "To such an extent, then," says St. Leo the Great, speaking of the Cross of our Lord, "was there effected a transfer from the Law to the Gospel, from the Synagogue to the Church, from the many sacrifices to one Victim, that, as Our Lord expired, that mystical veil which shut off the innermost part of the temple and its sacred secret was rent violently from top to bottom."

The Fathers and Medievals:

The Fathers also tell us of the inability of the Law to procure justification, and they agree with St. Paul that the Old Covenant Law, as a legal entity devoid of grace, will condemn all in sin. Here is a small sampling of their writings:

Chrysostom: For there are some that say, that he is not here saying what he does of the Law of Moses, but some take it of the law of nature; some, of the commandment given in Paradise. Yet surely Paul's object everywhere is to annul this Law, but he has not any question with those. And with much reason; for it was through a fear and a horror of this that the Jews obstinately opposed grace. (Homilies on Romans, 6:12).

Augustine: Although, therefore, the apostle seems to reprove and correct those who were being persuaded to be circumcised, in such terms as to designate by the word "law" circumcision itself and other similar legal observances, which are now rejected as shadows of a future substance by Christians who yet hold what those shadows figuratively promised; he at the same time, nevertheless, would have it to be clearly understood that the law, by which he says no man is justified, lies not merely in those sacramental [ceremonial] institutions which contained promissory figures, but also in those works by which whosoever has done them lives holily, and amongst which occurs this prohibition: "Thou shalt not covet."

Is it possible to contend that it is not the law which was written on those two tablets that the apostle describes as “the letter that killeth,” but the law of circumcision and the other sacred rites which are now abolished? But then how can we think so, when in the law occurs this precept, “Thou shalt not covet,” by which very commandment, notwithstanding it being holy, just, and good, “sin,” says the apostle, “deceived me, and by it slew me”? What else can this be than “the letter” that “killeth”? (On the Spirit and the Letter, NPNF, vol. 5, p. 93).

Thomas Aquinas: “I answer that he is speaking here about keeping the commandments of the Law insofar as the Law consists of ceremonial precepts and moral precepts. This is the Law that is not of faith..Therefore, strictly speaking, he fulfills the command of faith who does not hope to obtain from it anything present and visible, but things invisible and eternal.” (*Commentary on Galatians 3:12*).

In brief, you can consult any commentary by the Fathers or the Medievals on such crucial passages as Hebrews 7:18; 8:7-8; 10:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6-14; Galatians 3:10-11; Romans 7:1-25 and they will state, in consensus, that the Mosaic Law has been legally abrogated, and all that remains of it are its moral and religious principles, but all of which have been incorporated into the New Covenant. The Mosaic Law does not have any legal status today whatsoever, for Jew or Gentile. If it did, we would all be under its curse, and condemned to eternal damnation.

Cardinal Ratzinger, John Paul II and the 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church:

I would also like to remark on three other sources that will confirm or add to the above findings. The first is the book written in 1998 by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger before he became pope, *Many Religions – One Covenant* (republished in 1999 by Ignatius Press). In it the Cardinal makes some necessary but often overlooked distinctions. On pages 52-53, for example, he states:

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 understand the difference between the “Old” and the “New” Covenant....In 2 Corinthians [3:4-18], Paul sets these two in diametrical opposition: the former is transitory; the latter abides perpetually. Transience is a characteristic of the Mosaic covenant.

Hence, if the Cardinal is correct and the Mosaic covenant is “transitory,” how, then, can the U.S. Catechism claim the opposite and say: “the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them”? The words “eternally valid” mean that the Mosaic covenant is not transitory.

The Cardinal's resolve is further delineated for us on page 63 where he says:

"God, according to the Prophet, will replace the broken Sinai covenant with a New Covenant that cannot be broken....The conditional covenant, which depended on man's faithful observance of the Law, is replaced by the unconditional covenant in which God binds himself irrevocably."

Once again, the Cardinal specifies the transitory and conditional nature of the Mosaic covenant. He adds, in agreement with John Paul II cited above in *Mulieris Dignitatem* V, 11, that the only covenant that is "irrevocable" is the New Covenant.

The cardinal's added wording regarding "irrevocability" is very important since various clerics and lay theologians today are claiming that God presently has a special covenant exclusively with the Jews that is irrevocable, which is, unfortunately, based on an erroneous interpretation of Romans 11:29's statement that "the gifts and call of God are irrevocable."

The error regarding the so-called "irrevocability" of the Jewish covenant stems from these various clerics and lay theologians misinterpreting two authoritative Catholic sources:

(a) the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and

(b) John Paul II's 1980 speech in Mainz, Germany. For example, the Jesuit magazine *Commonweal*, on April 22, 2005, concluded in regard to John Paul II's Mainz speech the following erroneous conclusion:

The direct extraordinary gift John Paul II gave to Jewry was his historically unprecedented affirmation of the validity of the Jewish covenant, that is, of Judaism.

It is obvious here that John Paul II made no mention of the "validity of the Jewish covenant" or "Judaism"; rather, *Commonweal* merely seized upon John Paul's vague reference to the "Old Covenant" and replaced it with the words "Jewish covenant" and "Judaism." This is an unprecedented move in Catholic educational institutions, but it is increasingly making itself known, and will continue to do so until the Holy See curtails it.

If we look closely at what John Paul II actually said, it is diametrically opposed to the interpretation of the *Commonweal* article. John Paul said:

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.

Obviously, we don't see the words "Jewish covenant" or "Judaism" in his statement. This shouldn't surprise us, for if we hold that John Paul II was being faithful to the tradition of the Church, then we are delighted to discover that no one in the history of the Catholic Church, much less its popes or councils, has ever taught that the "Jewish covenant" or "Judaism" has not been revoked and replaced by the New Covenant in Christ. As noted in the many traditional citations above, they have all taught just the opposite – the covenant God made with the Jewish people through Moses has been revoked.

If, as we should do, interpret John Paul II's statement in Mainz to be consistent with tradition, what we see is not a reference to an abiding "Jewish covenant" but only a reference to "the first...part of her Bible." We can see, then, that John Paul II was merely equating the "Old Covenant" with the "first...part of her Bible," namely, the Old Testament Scriptures. It is the Bible that came from the Jews that has not been revoked, not the "Jewish covenant" or "Judaism." The two interpretations couldn't be more diametrically opposed, and there is simply nothing in the pope's speech that supports *Commonweal's* interpretation.

Again, in John Paul II's usage of terminology, the "Old Covenant" and the "Old Testament Bible" are one in the same. This is allowable because "covenant" and "testament" are often interchangeable terms. If, instead of "The Old Covenant is not revoked," the pope had said: "The Old Testament is not revoked," it would have meant the same thing, and would, perhaps, have been more easily understood and not subject to the misinterpretation it was given by *Commonweal*.

We shouldn't be surprised at John Paul's terminology, for it is precisely the same terminology that appears in the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that he himself approved. There it is even clearer that "Old Covenant" refers to the Scriptures of the Hebrew Bible, not a "Jewish covenant" or "Judaism." In paragraph 121 of the pope's catechism it states:

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

The common error prevalent today is to separate the 1994 Catechism's reference to the "Old Testament" from its reference to the "Old Covenant" and imply that the "Old Covenant" refers to the Mosaic covenant, or perhaps some other legal covenant made exclusively with the Jews. But the catechism shows no intention of doing so, since it doesn't mention either the Mosaic covenant or any other covenant in the surrounding context. The 1994 Catechism's intent, which can be gleaned from its reference to the "Old Testament" as "Sacred Scripture," is to show us that the Old Testament Scriptures are synonymous with the "Old Covenant." This interpretation makes perfect sense,

since we all agree that the Old Testament Scriptures have never been “revoked,” for we use them consistently in our mass, devotions, and daily living, and thus they retain a “permanent value” for us. But it is a practical and/or spiritual value, not a legal value. Unfortunately, many people do not understand the crucial difference between the practical and the legal, which leads to all kinds of confusion and heresy.

That a focus on the permanent value of the Old Testament Scriptures is the single intent of the 1994 Catechism’s paragraph 121 is confirmed by paragraphs 122 and 123. The former refers exclusively to the Old Testament as Scripture which, “declare in prophecy the coming of Christ” and that 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...’”

The latter paragraph [123] continues the same theme, stating: “the Church has always vigorously opposed the idea of rejecting the Old Testament under the pretext that the New has rendered it void.” In this case, the term “Old Covenant” from paragraph 121 is switched to “Old Testament” in paragraph 123, clearly showing that they are one and the same.

Cardinal Ratzinger’s book:

Now, going back to Cardinal Ratzinger’s book, *Many Religions – One Covenant*, he affirms the same truths on several more pages. On pages 66-67 he writes:

The Old Covenant is particular and concerns the ‘fleshly’ descendants of Abraham. The New Covenant is universal and is addressed to all peoples....The Old Covenant is conditional: since it depends on the keeping of the Law....By contrast, the covenant sealed in the Last Supper...is not a contract with conditions but the gift of friendship, irrevocably bestowed.

Notice the words “irrevocably bestowed” that the Cardinal assigns only to the New Covenant. Never once in his book, or in anything he has ever written, does he say that the Old Covenant God made with Moses, or the “Jewish covenant,” is “irrevocably bestowed.”

Finally, on page 70, the Cardinal makes clear the summation of all he has stated, and it is clearly opposed to the language that is often being used today by those claiming that the Old Covenant has not been superseded. The Cardinal says, quite clearly and without equivocation: “Thus the Sinai covenant is indeed superseded.”

Although the United States catechism’s words (“Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them”) do not use the word “superseded,” it is essentially saying the same thing, and it is obviously opposed to

what the Cardinal wrote in his book, as well as being opposed to the tradition of the Church, Holy Scripture, and the other authoritative sources I have mentioned above.

I am almost certain that Pope Benedict XVI believes the same way today as he did when he was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger about the nature of the covenants, since he has given no indication he thinks any differently.

Although we can all agree that the Sinai covenant has its fulfillment in the New Covenant and thus its principles of good conduct and holy living are carried on in the New Covenant, this has nothing to do with the fact that, as a legal entity, the Old Covenant was abrogated and replaced by the New Covenant.

I hope that you will see fit to have the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* corrected. If you would be so kind as to reply and inform me of your intentions, I would be most grateful.

Sincerely,

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