

standing of repentance and reconciliation in Catholic and Jewish traditions and the extremely complex and sensitive question of the church and the Shoah (Holocaust). It discussed and issued two joint statements, "Protecting Religious Freedom and Holy Sites" and "Recommendation on Education in Catholic and Jewish Seminaries and Theology Schools" (see www.nccbuscc.org/seia/liaison.htm). And it considered at some length what might be the implications for Catholic-Jewish relations, or, more precisely, for the Catholic understanding of the relationship of the church to the Jewish people, of the declaration *Dominus Iesus*, which was issued by the Holy See's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in September 2000.

Dominus Iesus, depending on how it is read, presents the church and the dialogue with a critical opportunity to move forward into new areas of mutual understanding and witness. At the meeting itself, Cardinal Walter Kasper's paper was given first and then that of Rabbi David Berger. This order, however, might leave in the minds of some the false impression that Rabbi Berger was responding to Cardinal Kasper's paper, when in fact he was responding to *Dominus Iesus*. Rabbi Berger had not seen Cardinal Kasper's paper when he wrote his own. What Rabbi Berger did—and all agreed he did it "brilliantly" (to use the term I heard most frequently from Catholic and Jewish participants alike)—was to set forth the concerns raised by *Dominus Iesus* in the mind of an extremely knowledgeable Jewish thinker, concerns widely shared in the Jewish community. Contrariwise, Cardinal Kasper's paper should not be understood simply as a response to *Dominus Iesus*. It sought to address what was central to Jewish concerns at the time,

and in its present form (it was revised after the meeting), those articulated so ably by Rabbi Berger as well.

The reader can decide how well the cardinal's response may allay the understandable concerns of the rabbi. Indeed, Cardinal Kasper himself notes more than one place in the discussion where further reflection and dialogue are needed. The cardinal's presentation is not simply an opinion about what *Dominus Iesus* might mean. Given the cardinal's authority within the Holy See, his address is an official statement of the Catholic Church to the Jewish people on the meaning of *Dominus Iesus*. It has, like *Dominus Iesus*, a definitive quality that the reader should not underestimate.

A key point made by the cardinal (and missed, I believe, in the rabbi's presentation) is that *Dominus Iesus* cannot properly be read on its own. It can be read properly only "in the larger context of all other official documents and declarations" that are relevant to it. A firm, magisterial teaching of the church, such as the "salvific" character of Judaism as a "faithful response" to divine revelation and God's covenant with the Jews, does not disappear simply because it is not mentioned in a document such as *Dominus Iesus*. That's not how the system works. The Jewish community should be reassured by Cardinal Kasper's clarification that what it understandably fears is not, in fact, where *Dominus Iesus* seeks to take the church. Indeed, Cardinal Kasper uses the discussion to raise anew the church's understanding of its "mission" to and with the Jews. I, personally, hope to see him carry this discussion forward to what I believe to be its logical conclusion.

Eugene J. Fisher

Dominus Iesus and the Jews

BY DAVID BERGER

THE DECLARATION *DOMINUS IESUS*, issued in September 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, aroused deep concern among many Jews and not a few Catholics. Let me first survey the specific areas of concern, then proceed to address the question of whether or not Jews can plausibly be said to lie outside the effective scope of the document, and finally express some personal views about the propriety or impropriety of the objections to the document that have been raised and examine the implications for Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

Jewish criticisms of *Dominus Iesus* have focused on sever-

al central points. The declaration maintains that the salvific grace of God is given only by means of Jesus and the church. Though "individual non-Christians" can attain this grace in a manner that remains difficult to define, it is a certainty that the process cannot take place without "a mysterious relationship with the church" (No. 20). This appears to mean that other religions, presumably including Judaism, have no independent salvific power. The text goes on to emphasize that although "followers of other religions can receive divine grace...*objectively speaking* [emphasis in the original] they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the

means of salvation” (No. 22). Thus, Jews, if they are included in this assertion, are apparently far less likely to be saved than Catholics.

Moreover, interreligious dialogue is described as part of the “evangelizing mission” of the church, “just one of the actions of the church in her mission *ad gentes*” (No. 22). The declaration goes on to emphasize in this context that though “equality is a presupposition of interreligious dialogue, [it] refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content” (No. 22). For many Jews, the denial of doctrinal equality is objectionable, even deeply objectionable, in and of itself, and the ascription of evangelical intent to the dialogue appears to be a dagger thrust into its very heart.

The most comprehensive approach to neutralizing these objections is the assertion that Jews, who received the initial divine revelation and entered into a covenant with God before the rise of Christianity, are *sui generis*. Not only was *Dominus Iesus* not formulated with Jews in mind; Jews, we are sometimes told, are entirely excluded from the purview of its controversial assertions.

I do not find this position plausible.

To begin with, the declaration contains one explicit reference to Jews, and it comes in the section entitled “Unicity and Universality of the Salvific Mystery of Jesus Christ,” a title almost identical with the subtitle of the document as a whole. “It was,” declares *Dominus Iesus*, “in the awareness of the one universal gift of salvation offered by the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit (cf. Eph. 1:3-14), that the first Christians encountered the Jewish people, showing them the fulfillment of salvation that went beyond the Law and, in the same awareness, they confronted the pagan world of their time, which aspired to salvation through a plurality of saviours” (No. 13). The following passages make it crystal clear that this encounter with the Jews is to be seen in the context of the firm belief that “the universal salvific will of the One and triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God” (No. 14).

It is almost superfluous to pursue the argument further. Though one short section, which declares “the canonical books of the Old and New Testament” fundamentally different from the sacred writings of other religions (No 8), clearly places Judaism and Christianity in the same category, it needs to be stressed that the central theme of the entire declaration, underscored on virtually every page, is that salvation comes in only one essential fashion for all humanity, and that is through the triune God of Christianity and his embodied Word. To suggest that Jews, who reject belief in both trinity and incarnation, attain salvation outside this otherwise universal system is to render the document virtually incoherent.

The principal author of *Dominus Iesus* is Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Last year on December 29, the cardinal wrote a conciliatory piece in *L'Osservatore Romano* emphasizing that “the faith witnessed by the Jewish Bible” is special to Christians because it is the foundation of their own; consequently, the dialogue with Jews takes place on a different level from all others. The article appeals to this special relationship to assert that the Nazis “tried to strike the Christian faith at its Abrahamic roots in the Jewish people.” As a Jewish observer has pointed out, this is a deeply objectionable effort to transform the Final Solution into a primarily anti-Christian campaign, but it is peripheral to our main concerns. The key point is that Cardinal Ratzinger’s affirmation of a unique Jewish-Christian relationship, which also includes the prayer that the paths of Jews and Christians will eventually converge, in no way contradicts or even modifies the unflinching message of *Dominus Iesus*. To understand the cardinal’s position more clearly, we need to look at his other writings about Jews and Judaism, collected in a slim volume entitled *Many Religions—One Covenant*.

In these essays, he speaks of reconciliation, emphasizes the ongoing role of the Jewish people and defends the value of the Hebrew Bible. It is clear, however, that he understands these positions as a rejection of the quasi-Marcionite position that the Hebrew Bible and its God embody reprehensible moral and religious qualities. On the contrary, argues the cardinal, the God of the Hebrew Bible is the same as that of the New Testament, and the Law of the Hebrew Bible, seen through the prism of the new covenant, does not really stand in conflict with it. But all this is simply classic, pre-modern Christian doctrine recast in a spirit of friendship.

“The Sinai covenant,” writes Cardinal Ratzinger, “is indeed superseded. But once what was provisional in it has been swept away we see what is truly definitive in it.... The New Covenant, which becomes clearer and clearer as the history of Israel unfolds...fulfills the dynamic expectation found in [the Sinai covenant]” (pp. 70-71). And in another formulation, “All cultic ordinances of the Old Testament are seen to be taken up into [Jesus’] death and brought to their deepest meaning.... The universalizing of the Torah by Jesus...preserves the unity of cult and ethos.... The entire cult is bound together in the Cross, indeed, for the first time has become fully real” (p. 41). Cardinal Ratzinger, then—who has also been quoted as declaring that despite Israel’s special mission at this stage of history, “we wait for the instant in which Israel will say yes to Christ” (The National Catholic Reporter, 10/6/00)—is a supersessionist.

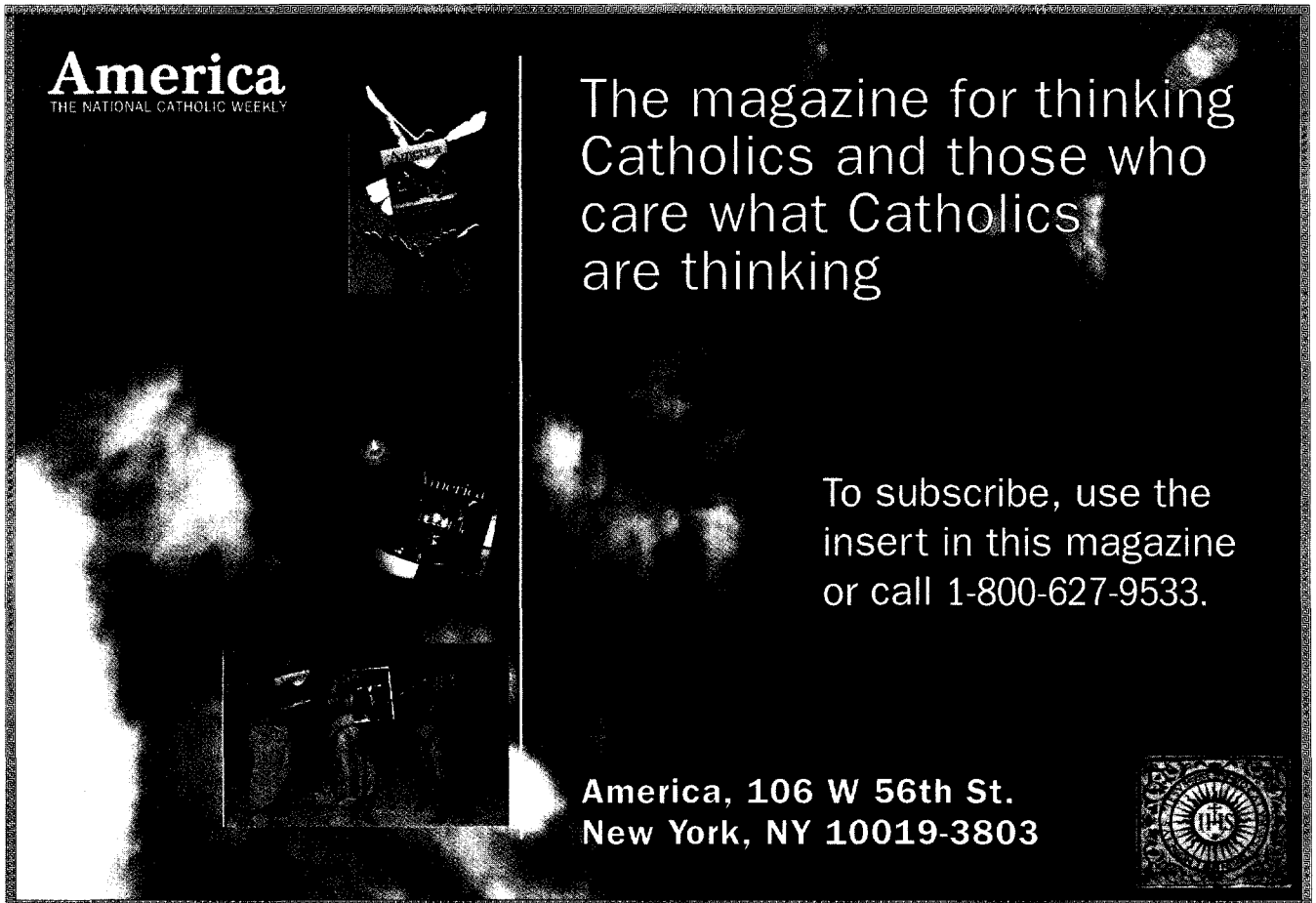
At this point we need to confront the real question, to wit, is there anything objectionable about this position? In

a dialogical environment in which the term “supersessionism” has been turned into an epithet by both Jews and Christians, this may appear to be a puzzling question. We need to distinguish, however, between two forms of supersessionism, and in my view Jews have absolutely no right to object to the form endorsed by Cardinal Ratzinger. There is nothing in the core beliefs of Christianity that requires the sort of supersessionism that sees Judaism as spiritually arid, as an expression of narrow, petty legalism pursued in the service of a vengeful God and eventually replaced by a vital religion of universal love. Such a depiction is anti-Jewish, even antisemitic. But Cardinal Ratzinger never describes Judaism in such a fashion. On the contrary, he sees believing Jews as witnesses through their observance of Torah to the commitment to God’s will, to the establishment of his kingdom even in the pre-messianic world and to faith in a wholly just world after the ultimate redemption (pp. 104-5). This understanding of Jews as a witness people is very different from the original Augustinian version, in which Jews testified to Christian truth through their validation of the Hebrew Bible and their interminable suffering in exile.

For Jews to denounce this sort of supersessionism as morally wrong and disqualifying in the context of dialogue is to turn dialogue into a novel form of religious intimidat-

tion. As the pre-eminent Orthodox rabbinical authority Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik understood very well, such a position is pragmatically dangerous for Jews, who become vulnerable to reciprocal demands for theological reform of Judaism, and it is even morally wrong. To illustrate the point from the perspective of Orthodox Judaism, I will not shrink from mobilizing the most telling illustration.

The cardinal theological sin in Judaism is *avodah zarah*, literally “foreign worship.” I became embroiled in a controversy several years ago when I carelessly used the usual translation “idolatry,” which is in fact sloppy and misleading in our context. Properly understood, *avodah zarah* is the formal recognition or worship as God of an entity that is in fact not God. For Jews, the worship of Jesus of Nazareth as God incarnate falls within this definition. Because of the monotheistic, non-pagan character of Christianity, many Jewish authorities denied that worship of Jesus is sinful for non-Jews, though many others did not endorse this exemption. Now, let us assume that I respect the Christian religion, as I do. Let us assume further that I respect believing Christians, as I do, for qualities that emerge precisely out of their Christian faith. But I believe that the worship of Jesus as God is a serious religious error displeasing to God even if the worshipper is a non-Jew, and that at the end of days Christians will come to recognize




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this. Is this belief immoral? Does it disqualify me as a participant in dialogue? Does it entitle a Christian to denounce me for adhering to a teaching of contempt? I hope the answer to these questions is no. If it is yes, then interfaith dialogue is destructive of traditional Judaism and must be abandoned forthwith. We would face a remarkable paradox. Precisely because of its striving for interfaith respect and understanding, dialogue would become an instrument of religious imperialism.

Once I take this position, I must extend it to Christians as well. As long as Christians do not vilify Judaism and Jews in the manner that I described earlier, they have every right to assert that Judaism errs about religious questions of the most central importance, that equality in dialogue does not mean that the parties' religious doctrines have equal standing, that at the end of days Jews will recognize the divinity of Jesus, even that salvation is much more difficult for one who stands outside the Catholic Church. If I were to criticize Cardinal Ratzinger for holding these views, I would be applying an egregious double standard. I am not unmindful of the fact that these doctrines, unlike comparable ones in Judaism, have served as a basis for persecution through the centuries. Nonetheless, once a Christian has explicitly severed the link between such beliefs and anti-Jewish attitudes and behavior, one cannot legitimately demand that he or she abandon them.

We are left, however, with the profoundly troubling passage about mission as a fundamental component of inter-religious dialogue. Is it possible that at least this assertion does not apply to Jews? Once again the answer must be negative. Here too the language of the declaration is thoroughly universal. In the very paragraph describing dialogue as an expression of mission, we read that "the Church, guided by charity and respect for freedom, must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through baptism and the other sacraments in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (No. 22). To say that this sentence, complete with its references to baptism and conversion, does not apply to Jews is to say they are not included among "all people" and are already "fully in communion" with the triune God.

Moreover, in an essay on dialogue dealing primarily with Jews and explicitly including them in the key passage, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote that missionary activity should not "cease and be replaced by dialogue.... This would be nothing other than total lack of conviction.... Rather, mission and dialogue should no longer be opposites but should mutually interpenetrate. Dialogue is not aimless conversation: it aims at conviction, at finding the truth; otherwise it

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is worthless." In a world where other people already know something about God, "proclamation of the gospel must be necessarily a dialogical process. We are not telling the other person something that is entirely unknown to him; rather, we are opening up the hidden depth of something with which, in his own religion, he is already in touch" (*Many Religions*, p.112).

In sum, we now have an official document of the Catholic Church, "ratified and confirmed" by the pope himself, declaring that a key purpose of interfaith dialogue is mission, which includes the message that conversion is necessary to attain full communion with God. There is overwhelming evidence that the author intended this to apply to Jews as well. Are there any considerations capable of mitigating the impact of such a statement sufficiently to enable a self-respecting Jew to continue to pursue this enterprise?

The answer, I think, is yes, but it is a highly qualified yes. First, it is very likely that a substantial majority of Catholics involved in the dialogue disagree with this assertion in *Dominus Iesus* despite its official standing. Second, Cardinal Ratzinger himself asserts in his other writings that the teachings of the church Fathers instruct us that before the end of days "the Jews must remain alongside us as a witness to the world" (*Many Religions*, p. 104). And speaking about dialogue among religions in general, he says that unification "is hardly possible within our histori-

cal time, and perhaps it is not even desirable" (p. 109). Finally, if dialogue avoids discussion of core doctrinal issues and focuses on shared moral, social and political concerns, it may well be justified even with people whose conversionary objectives are much sharper than those of *Dominus Iesus*. Many Jews hold discussions about such issues with evangelical Protestants who conduct overt missions to the Jews, and Rabbi Soloveitchik, who did not believe that such objectives had been abandoned by the Catholic Church, endorsed discussion of these matters with full awareness that theological content would play a significant role.

Orthodox Jews are routinely subjected to criticism for conforming to Rabbi Soloveitchik's guidelines by resisting dialogue with a primarily theological focus. The appearance of an official Catholic assertion that a major objective of dialogue is mission is a striking, unwelcome and, for me at least, unexpected validation of the rabbi's much-maligned concerns. At the very least, criticism of the avoidance of dialogue about doctrinal issues should be suspended as long as this passage of *Dominus Iesus* remains in force without a formal assertion by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith or the pope himself that it does not apply to dialogue with Jews.

Many of the criticisms leveled against *Dominus Iesus* strike me as unwarranted, and I greatly admire Cardinal

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Ratzinger's profound commitment to his faith. Despite huge gaps in implementation, the Catholic Church as a whole and the pope in particular have taken steps to improve relations with the Jewish people that merit our highest regard. Generally speaking, criticisms of these initiatives from both Jewish and Christian quarters, even when technically valid, diminish their moral significance and sometimes cross the line into blinkered, almost churlish petulance. For all its imperfections, I see the statement on the Shoah as a historic act of genuine ethical

stature, and the pope's apology for Christian antisemitism and his behavior during his trip to Israel fill me with unalloyed admiration. But a climactic paragraph of *Dominus Iesus* effectively expects Jews to participate in an endeavor officially described as an effort to lead them, however gently and indirectly, to accept beliefs antithetical to the core of their faith. Many Jews will no doubt swallow their self-respect and proceed as if nothing has happened. But it is not clear that they should, and they should surely not be criticized if they do not.



The Good Olive Tree

BY WALTER KASPER

THE DECLARATION *DOMINUS IESUS*, published in September 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, has sparked various reactions by different people and communities, including Jews.

Obviously, there have been some misunderstandings.

The highly technical language of this document for the instruction of Catholic theologians—a document that is perhaps a little too densely written—raised misunderstandings on the very meaning and intention of the text among people who are not very familiar with Catholic theological “jargon” and with the rules of its correct interpretation.

ART BY GERARD QUIGLEY