

Point/Counterpoint on Romans 11:29

R. Sungenis: Here I respond to Mr. Michael's "Irrevocable Calling and Gifts: A Reading of Romans 11:29" which he placed at: <http://www.lumengentleman.com/content.asp?id=311>. Mr. Michael did not send his essay to me, nor does he mention me by name in the essay, but some of the material he covers deals with the essay I posted at <http://www.catholicintl.com/catholicissues/sap.pdf>.

Mr. Michael: Romans 11:29 comes at the end of a larger subsection - Romans 11:25-32 - which itself serves, in the words of one scholar, as "a summary-conclusion to Romans 9-11." (M. Getty, "Paul and the Salvation of Israel: A Perspective on Romans 9-11", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50.3 [July 1988], p. 457) Andrew Wakefield comments further on the purpose of the still larger division of Romans 9-11 as a whole: "Once typically relegated to the status of a mere appendix to Paul's great exposition of justification by faith in chapters 1-8, chapters 9-11 are now seen by most commentators as the climax of that argument, and indeed of the book as a whole." (A. Wakefield, "Romans 9-11: The Sovereignty of God and the Status of Israel", *Review and Expositor* 100 [Winter 2003], p. 65)

In a way, then, this verse can be seen as a kind of summary of a summary, as a text which offers the supporting argument to everything that has been said in the previous chapters of Romans. At a minimum, Romans 11:29 must be seen as supplying the (theo)logical underpinnings of what is said immediately prior to it, in verses 25-28. St. Paul has just shared with his readers a "mystery" concerning the fact that "a hardening has come upon part of Israel"; this hardening, however, is temporary, and will only last "until the full number of the Gentiles come in" (v. 25);

R. Sungenis: Paul does not say that the hardening is "temporary." There were plenty of Greek words Paul could have used to denote a "temporary" situation, but he didn't use any of them. The word "until" doesn't help, since it can terminate or continue the action of the main verb in either Greek or English. The only way one could know if the hardening was temporary (that is, that the hardening would be removed before the Second Coming) is to prove that the "fullness of the Gentiles," which is the terminus of the hardening, occurs prior to the Second Coming. If the "fullness of the Gentiles" occurs on the day of the Second Coming, then there is no room left to remove the hardening upon Israel.

Moreover, Mr. Michael must also show Scriptural evidence that "hardenings" administered by God were ever removed. But there is no such evidence. "Hardenings" were never removed. In

fact, they were given precisely because the person or persons remained unrepentant and God sealed their unbelief with his own hardening.

Mr. Michael: after this scenario has played itself out, "all Israel will be saved", says St. Paul, reaching for two Isaian texts (Is. 59:20 conflated with Is. 27:9) to demonstrate his point (vv. 26-27).

R. Sungenis: Romans 11:26 does not say: "after this scenario has played itself out." Unfortunately, this is one of many times that Mr. Michael adds words to the passage that are not there. Paul uses a Greek adverb, "thus," to preface the phrase. It actually says, "and thus all Israel shall be saved," not "and after this all Israel shall be saved." As an adverb, "thus" modifies the verb "saved" and tells how Israel will be saved, that is, they will be saved in precisely the manner in which Paul has described in verses 1-24 – a remnant will be saved who turn to God in faith (vrs. 5, 14, 23).

As for Isaiah 27:9 or 59:20, they don't demonstrate any evidence for a future conversion of the last generation of Jews. The former merely speaks about forgiving Jacob's sins and the latter says the forgiveness will be given by the "Redeemer." If Mr. Michael can find a passage of Scripture that says the Redeemer will forgive, *en masse*, the sins of the last generation of Jews on earth, then he would have a Scriptural precedent, but there is no such passage of Scripture. All the passages that speak about forgiving Israel's sins begin at the FIRST COMING. That is why Luke 1:72, 77 says to the nation of Israel at Christ's First Coming: "And to remember his holy covenant...To give to His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins," which matches perfectly with Romans 11:27: "this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

Mr. Michael: A final assertion is made concerning the fact that the Jews are "enemies of God, for your sake" with regard to the Gospel, but "they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers" with regard to God's "election." (v. 28) In short, St. Paul asserts that God has not finished with Israel, nor has He abandoned them; on the contrary, for the sake of the Patriarchs, Israel continues to be "beloved" by God. The reason for all of this - the abiding and special relationship between God and Israel, the future conversion of "all Israel" - is given next:

R. Sungenis: The verses say nothing about a "future conversion" of Israel. This is another instance in which Mr. Michael adds words that are not in the text, showing that he comes to the passage with a preconceived idea. The passage says only that they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. No one is arguing that "God is done with Israel," per se. My whole premise is

that God is still dealing with the Jews, since he wants to save as many Jews as possible, but he can only save those who “do not persist in their unbelief” (Romans 11:23). There is nothing in Romans 11 that says salvation is being saved up for a future mass conversion of the last generation of Jews, while other Jews for the last two millennia are more or less forgotten. But that is essentially what Mr. Michael’s exegesis does – it says that God will love the last generation of Jews but not love all the previous generations who remained in their hardness. No, Paul teaches that God loves all the Jews, and that is why God continually offers all of them the Gospel, but unfortunately, the Jews, in the main, don’t love Christ in return, and thus they remain in their unbelief.

Mr. Michael: For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. (Rom. 11:29). The basis for the claims that St. Paul makes about Israel is, quite simply, the fact that God’s “gifts” and His “call” are “irrevocable.” As the lynchpin, so to speak, of St. Paul’s argument, it is worth our time and effort to look more closely at this verse and ask a few basic questions. What are the “gifts” that St. Paul says are “irrevocable”? What is the “call of God” that is likewise “irrevocable”? Upon what is this calling based? More fundamentally still, what is even meant by the term “irrevocable”?

We will begin by looking at the “call of God” in v. 29, for this seems to be one of the more easily comprehended elements of the text. If we look back to the Old Testament, the calling of Israel - which is just another way of saying “the *vocation* of Israel” - is spelled out quite clearly. What is of most interest to us here is the chronology involved in this vocation/calling. We read in the prophecy of Hosea the following words of God:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. (Hos. 11:1)

From this text we are able to formulate a foundational argument: God *called* Israel “when Israel was a child,” and this calling was situated within the context of Israel’s bondage to Egypt. Before Israel had departed from Egypt, they were God’s son and had received their calling from Him. The Exodus story confirms this: “Thus says the LORD, Israel is my first-born son.” (Ex. 4:22) Elsewhere, Isaiah speaks in similar terms: “The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name ... he said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified’” (Is. 49:1,3)

The calling of Israel is thus established as a historical fact stretching back at least to Israel’s time in Egypt prior to the Exodus, and, judging by Isaiah’s words, even back to the time when Israel was still in “the womb” and “the body of my mother,” that is, before Israel was even a nation. A

later passage in Isaiah sheds further light upon the matter, identifying for us who was Israel's "mother":

Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance, you who seek the LORD; look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were digged. Look to Abraham your father and to *Sarah who bore you*; for when he was but one *I called him*, and I blessed him and made him many. (Is. 51:1-2)

The calling of Israel, then, is rooted in the calling of Abraham, and this calling of Abraham is envisaged by Isaiah as extending to Israel, in a sense, while Israel was still "in the body" of "Sarah who bore you." In other words, the gracious election of Israel by God did not take place in a vacuum, but is founded upon a much earlier calling: the calling of Abraham, and the subsequent covenant oaths sworn by God to him. This accords well with what St. Paul said in Romans 11: "as regards *election* they are beloved *for the sake of their forefathers*." The same thing is stated by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy: "he loved your fathers and *chose their descendants after them*, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence" (Dt. 4:37)

The important point to notice about the chronology of Israel's calling is the fact that it took place before their deliverance from Egypt, which is to say, before the swearing of the Covenant at Sinai. Thus the calling and election of Israel by God is not based upon the Covenant made at Sinai; the calling and election of Israel came long before Sinai, and is based upon God's gracious choice, as both St. Paul and Deuteronomy again affirm: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is *because the LORD loves you*, and is *keeping the oath* which he swore to your fathers" (Dt. 7:7), and "when Rebecca had conceived children [Jacob/Israel and Esau] by one man ... though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that *God's purpose of election* might continue ... *because of his call*, she was told, 'The elder will serve the younger.'" (Rom. 9:10-12)

If the calling and election of Israel was based on God's gracious choice, and upon His faithfulness to the oath He swore to Abraham, then it would be incorrect to say that the "calling of God" was based upon Israel's fidelity to the Sinai Covenant; indeed, as pointed out above, the calling took place prior to that Covenant, and is therefore quite independent of it.

An analogy could be drawn here to what takes place in the life of a young man who decides to enter the priesthood. There is a great deal of correspondence here, in fact, because in Catholic parlance this young man is said to have a *vocation* - a calling - and the result of his calling/vocation is that he will receive one of the sacraments of the *New Covenant*. Just as with

Israel, so also will the young man receive his vocation and calling long before he actually receives the Sacrament of Holy Orders, his priestly consecration. The purpose of the consecration ritual is precisely to enable the man to fulfill his vocation, just as the Sinai Covenant - the consecration of Israel as a *priestly* nation (cf. Ex. 19:6) - was made with Israel in order to enable them to fulfill *their* priestly vocation. In short, the consecration (Covenant) comes *after* the calling/vocation, and serves to support the vocation; that is to say, the "gifts" enable the "calling" to be fulfilled. Israel's calling and election is not based on the Covenant, but rather, the Covenant is sworn because of an already-existing vocation.

This leads us to consider the next portion of Romans 11:29: what is the meaning or content of the "gifts" which God gave to Israel, and which are "irrevocable"? It seems obvious that those "gifts" refer, at a minimum, to the Covenant(s) which God swore with His people. Here we face something of an interpretive quandary, however, because this particular verse in Romans 11 has - for whatever reason - been largely ignored or given only cursory treatment by theologians and commentators for the past 2,000 years. The great commentaries by Fr. Haydock and Dom Bernard Orchard do not treat the verse directly; St. John Chrysostom skips it completely; Joseph Sievers notes that "None of the Latin Church Fathers *stricto sensu* (i.e., not counting Ambrosiaster and Pelagius) comments on this part of Romans." (J. Sievers, "'God's Gifts and Call are Irrevocable': The Interpretation of Rom 11:28 and its Uses", *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, no. 36 [1997], p. 339)

Sievers goes on to point out that "Rom 11:29 was never cited in official Catholic pronouncements before Vatican II." (Sievers, p. 347) After Vatican II, however, this verse has received a good deal of attention in various magisterial documents, undoubtedly because of its potential to advance Jewish-Catholic relations. The text has either been explicitly quoted or alluded to in the conciliar documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and speeches by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, just to name a few. In several of those cases, the text is interpreted in such a way that the "gifts" of Romans 11:29 refer to the Covenant:

In writing to the Romans (cf. Rom 11: 16-18), St Paul was already speaking of the holy root of Israel on which pagans are grafted onto Christ, "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11: 29), and you continue to be the first-born people of the Covenant. (Pope John Paul II, Message to the Chief Rabbi of Rome, May 22, 2004, 2, [source](#))

... there is need for acknowledgment of the common roots linking Christianity and the Jewish people, who are called by God to a covenant which remains irrevocable (cf. Rom 11:29) (101)

and has attained definitive fullness in Christ. (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 56, [source](#))

The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ", (Rom. 9:4-5) "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." (Rom. 11:29) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 839)

The exegetical move made by the *Catechism* in this last example is of particular interest, for here the "gifts" of Romans 11:29 are explicitly linked to the privileges of Israel enumerated by St. Paul in Romans 9:4-5. Sievers notes in passing that "Most scholars agree that the divine favors of Rom. 9:4-5 are meant" by the "gifts" of Romans 11:29 (J. Sievers, "'God's Gifts and Call Are Irrevocable': The Reception of Romans 11:29 through the Centuries and Christian-Jewish Relations", in C. Grenholm [ed.], *Reading Israel in Romans* [Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000], p.133). As proof of the point, he references no less than 15 exegetes, including Catholic authors Rudolph Cornely, S.J., Stanislaus Lyonnet, S.J., and Francois Refoule, O.P. Protestant scholars John Murray and James Dunn concur:

"The gifts and the calling of God" have reference to those mentioned in 9:4,5 as the privileges and prerogatives of Israel. (J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968], p. 101)

For *charismata* [gifts] see on 1:11. Here the concrete enactments of divine grace no doubt refer to or at least include those listed in 9:4-5 ... By "gifts" Paul presumably refers again to the covenant privileges listed in 9:4-5, but as a general word for all the enactments and manifestations of divine grace his readers might justifiably give it a wider reference (cf. 1:11; 5:15-16; 6:23; 12:6). (J. Dunn, *Romans in Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38B [Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988], pp. 686, 694)

At the very least, given the way in which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* links Romans 9:4-5 with Romans 11:29, we must seriously consider the possibility that the gifts enumerated in Romans 9 are precisely those referred to in Romans 11. What are those gifts of Romans 9:4-5? St. Paul says, "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ." Thus, the "covenants" are among the "gifts" which St. Paul says are "irrevocable."

R. Sungenis: I have no argument that Romans 11:29's "gifts and call" might refer, at least in part, to the items listed in Romans 9:4-5, but this doesn't help Mr. Michael's case. First, it does nothing to demonstrate that there will be a massive conversion of the last generation of Jews. More importantly, it actually puts a damper on Mr. Michael's previous distinction between the Mosaic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant, since Romans 9:4 mentions items that belong exclusively or preponderantly to the Mosaic covenant, namely, "the giving of the Law" and "temple service." And we already know that these particular Mosaic items were, indeed, revoked (Hb 7:18; 8:13; 10:9), and even some of the Abrahamic items were revoked (circumcision, which began with Abraham, not Moses). So Mr. Michael is in a bit of a quandary here. If he says that Romans 11:29's "irrevocability" refers exclusively to Romans 9:4-5 wherein we know that some of its items have been revoked, then he has a contradiction.

The solution, of course, is to understand the "gifts and call of God" as a generic phrase regarding the spiritual blessing God wants to give Israel, not national glory or ethnic status above the rest of the world. In other words, Paul is talking about the call of salvation that was given to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. This is already indicated to us in the very first promise God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, since when we compare that passage with Galatians 3:8 we find that it was at that time God "preached the Gospel to Abraham." It is the same reason that Paul says in Romans 9:6: "For they are not all Israel who are from Israel." It is the same reason Paul says in Romans 2:28: that a "true Jew is one who is circumcised inwardly, in the heart, by the Spirit," not those circumcised outwardly and reject Christ. It is the same reason that Paul says in Romans 11:5-10 that there is "a remnant chosen by grace" and the rest remained hardened. God and Paul are interested in who out of apostate and rejected Jewry are going to turn to Christ and be saved, and God will never take that opportunity away from the Jews because he made a promise to Abraham.

Unfortunately, Mr. Michael distorts and confuses all of this information when he decides to ignore the spiritual dimension of Paul's teaching. He must realize that, on a national and ethnic basis, God is done with Israel. He is now interested in Jews who want to accept Christ individually and join the Church. If Mr. Michael wants to say that the "gifts and call" that are irrevocable refer to the promises God made to Abraham, I won't have too much of a problem, provided Mr. Michael understands that God never promised Abraham that the last generation of Jews on earth would convert to Christ. Paul is emphatic in Romans 11:1-5 that the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in the REMNANT that was saved all throughout Jewish history, even down to the present day; and Paul uses himself as an example of how God fulfilled his promise to Abraham. When you add up all the Jewish believers from the time of Abraham to the Second Coming they, metaphorically

speaking, will be like the stars of the sky in number and that is what Paul means by "all Israel" in Romans 11:26. It is all of SPIRITUAL Israel, the elect, that will be saved, not all of national Israel someday in the distant future.

Mr. Michael: What, finally, is the meaning of the word "irrevocable"? The Greek word *ametameleta* is only found in one other place in the New Testament, at least in this particular form; the root verb *metamellomai* simply means "to repent", in the sense of changing one's mind or disposition - see, for example, the way the word is used in Hebrews 7:21, "The Lord has sworn and will not *change his mind*, 'Thou art a priest for ever.'" The prefix *a-* negates the word *metamellomia*, and so the word translated as "irrevocable" is more literally translated as "unrepented" or "unrepentable." So why do so many English translations (NIV, NKJV, NASB, RSV, NAB) render the word as "irrevocable", then, if the word means "without repentance" or "unrepentable"?

To get a better understanding of the term *ametameleta*, we must examine the only other place in Scripture where it is used:

For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret [*metamelomai*] it (though I did regret [*metemelomen*] it), for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance [*metanoian*] that leads to salvation and brings *no regret* [*ametameleton*], but worldly grief produces death. (2 Cor. 7:8-10)

The phrase in question here is "godly grief produces a *repentance*" - and here the word *metanoian* is used - "that leads to salvation and brings *no regret*" - and here our word *ametameleton* is used. The usage of the word in this particular passage, then, only seems to strengthen the idea that it should be interpreted in the sense of something psychological (regret), rather than something juridical (irrevocable).

The great Catholic exegete Ceslas Spicq, O.P., has written one of the most thorough - and indeed, one of the *only* - treatments of the usage of this word *ametameleta* in Romans 11:29. In taking the time to comment upon the text of 2 Cor. 7:10, Spicq notes that St. Paul uses the word here as a kind of pun (juxtaposing a *repentance* [*metanoian*] which one does not *regret* [*ametameleton*], or, to capture the pun, a *repentance* of which one does not *repent*), and as such, the meaning of the Greek word in this particular context must retain its traditional meaning: "Le jeu de mots est évident, et cette évolution des 'regrets' demande de traduire l'adjectif selon sa

signification classique." (C. Spicq, "AMETAMELETOS dans Rom., XI, 29", *Revue Biblique* 67 [1960], pp. 214-215)

However, Spicq is also insistent upon the point that even here, the word carries with it something of a shade of the meaning "irrevocable" or "unchanging" - for any kind of real "repentance" must include true contrition and a purpose of amending one's ways. Even here, then, *ametameleton* includes a sense of "without return", a "repentance" that does not go back on itself: "Mais, si l'on y réfléchit, on ne voit pas bien ce qu'est une repentance dont on ne se repent pas, sinon, positivement, une contrition ferme et sans retour; ainsi que l'a compris l'étymologie, la pensée est celle d'une *metanoia* qui ne changera plus." (Spicq, p. 215)

Apart from this passage in 2 Corinthians, however, Spicq maintains that the Greek word *ametameleton* does indeed carry the legal meaning of "irrevocable", and he demonstrates this by appeal to various ancient papyri, noting that there are two "courants sémantiques" which overlap - "l'un littéraire, l'autre juridique." (Spicq, p. 212) In these legal documents ("actes juridiques"), Spicq says that "testateurs ou contractants affirment le détermination de leur volonté inchangeable et irrévocable", adding that if these documents were dated a bit earlier, one could almost say they were "parallèles" of Romans 11:29.

Spicq concludes that the translation of *ametameleton* as "without repentance" is too weak, and that a sense of irrevocability must be included here, understood in the context of the great love of the "Donateur par excellence." (Spicq, pp. 218-219) He ends by saying that, because Israel remains *agapetos* ("beloved") according to Romans 11:28, "sa vocation est indéfectible", and that the effects of God's grace will be realized *per fas et nefas* (Latin: "through right and wrong").

Finally, Dunn quotes Spicq's entry on *ametameletos* in volume 1 of *Notes de lexicographie Néo-Testamentaire*, in which he states that the Greek word in question has the "force of a legal axiom" (quoted in Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 686) As we have already seen in the way that the root word is used in the LXX of Psalm 110:4 ("The Lord sware, and *will not repent*, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec"), to "repent" of something can indeed - as it does in this context of the royal coronation and Covenant oath to David - carry a legal meaning of something which is irrevocable. Perhaps this rather obvious sense of the word is precisely why it is so commonly translated as "irrevocable" in our English Bibles, and why Pope John Paul II referred precisely to Romans 11:29 in order to support his statement that the Old Covenant was "never revoked by God [cf. Rom. 11,29]." (Pope John Paul II, Address to the Hebrew Community in Mainz, November 17, 1980, [source](#))

R. Sungenis: Mr. Michael's work, although relevant in some respects, is a rather pedantic display of Greek etymology that doesn't help him prove his thesis about a future mass conversion of the last generation of Jews. Whether *ametameleton* is personal or juridical makes little difference when we understand the true spiritual meaning of God's "gifts and call."

Using an exclusively juridical meaning of *ametameleton* makes a difference only when we see people today who are partial to the Jewish national cause try to force Romans 11:29 to say: "The Old Covenant is not revoked," making it appear as if the Old Covenant has some legal validity for the Jews of today. It does not. The Old Covenant as we have always understood the term in Christian theology, has been revoked. But the "gifts and call of God," that is, the spiritual call to the Jews to become saved, has not been revoked, and/or God does not "regret" that he allowed the Jews to remain on earth to answer that call. Why would he? The whole context of Romans 11 is for the purpose of saving as many Jews as possible, but it is not going to be a case where 20+ centuries of Jews are fresh out of luck and the last generation is going to hit the lottery. Scripture nowhere teaches that scenario, and Scripture is the ultimate source of information for this issue.

Mr. Michael: In conclusion, we have seen that Romans 11:29 provides the reader with St. Paul's justification and foundation for the claims he makes in Romans 11:25-28 concerning Israel's continuing relationship with God; He has not finished with Israel yet, even though a hardness has come upon a part of Israel, and He will save them in the end, precisely because the "gifts" and "call" are "irrevocable."

R. Sungenis: Yes, Romans 11:29 provides the "justification and foundation for the claims he makes in Romans 11:25-28," but neither passage says: "He will save them in the end." Again, if Mr. Michael would stop adding his own words to the verse and just read what the verse says, we could advance the discussion. The fact is, Jews from Israel can be saved today, and can be saved in the first through the twentieth centuries, because God's "gifts and call are irrevocable," or God's "gifts and call are unrepented." But since Mr. Michael wants to limit the "gifts and call" to whatever he envisions from Romans 9:4-5, he gets bogged down in trying to promote some national and ethnic basis of fulfillment instead of understanding it as the call to individual Jews to come into spiritual Israel.

As I said above, the reason this plays out as it does is that the "fullness of the Gentiles" takes us up to the very Last Day when Christ returns, unless, of course, Mr. Michael can prove that Gentiles will cease becoming saved prior to the Last Day, or prove that Luke 21:24-25 does not indicate that immediately after the "Gentile fullness" the end of the world occurs. He must also show us at least one instance in Scripture where God's hardening was removed. If he can't

demonstrate these two basic requirements, then there is simply nothing in Romans 11:24-29 that teaches a massive conversion of the last generation of Jews.

Mr. Michael: We also saw that the "call" of God in v. 29 was synonymous with the "election" of God in v. 28; this call-vocation-election occurred before the Sinai Covenant, and is therefore independent of that Covenant; the vocation itself, as we observed in Isaiah, is rooted in the call and vocation of Abraham.

R. Sungenis: Actually, what we saw is that Mr. Michael's attempt to equate Romans 11:29 with Romans 9:4-5 contradicts his assertion that the "gifts and call" do not include the Mosaic covenant, since it is obvious that Romans 9:4-5 includes items from the Mosaic covenant. Mr. Michael can't have it both ways.

As for the "call" of Romans 11:29 being equated to the "election" of Romans 11:28, I agree. The problem, however, is that Mr. Michael wants to define the "election" in terms of Israel still being an elect nation rather than a term which separates Jews who have accepted Christ from Jews who have rejected him. Contrary to what Mr. Michael is proposing, Paul does not use the word "elect" in the national or ethnic sense. The proper understanding of "elect" was established in his application of the word in Romans 11:7: "the elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened," showing that the "elect" refers to those Jews who accept Christ and are separated from the remaining Jews who don't accept Christ. In other words, God has mercy on the Jews that will be saved, the "elect," not the whole nation of Israel. Again, this is precisely why Paul said in Romans 9:6: "they are not all Israel that are from Israel."

Mr. Michael: Examining the usage of Romans 11:29 in the *Catechism*, and surveying the opinions of various exegetes, we saw that the "gifts" of Romans 11:29 are quite likely a reference to the privileges of Israel enumerated in Romans 9:4-5, including the "covenants."

R. Sungenis: We saw the flaw in that thinking because Romans 9:4-5 includes elements of the Mosaic covenant. The "gifts and call," as one can see from the verse immediately before Romans 11:29, refers to the "Gospel." If Paul had said in Romans 11:29: "The Gospel of God is irrevocable," it would have meant the same things as saying "The gifts and call of God are irrevocable." The whole passage is concerned with the Gospel, not ethnic status or national revival.

Mr. Michael: Finally, we saw that the Greek word *ametameletos* has historically had a literary and a juridical meaning, and that even in its usage at 2 Cor. 7:10, it carries the sense of

irrevocability and refusal to change. In its context in Romans 11, with the love and grace of God in view, it only makes sense to render the Greek as "irrevocable" with regard to Israel.

R. Sungenis: What we saw is that it really makes no difference whether *ametameletos* is personal or juridical, as long as we understand that it applies to the "gifts and call" and not to the "Old Covenant," and that we understand "gifts and call" refers to the Gospel (as Paul noted in verse 28).

If a Catholic is sensitive to the "juridical," then he will cease using the phrase "Old Covenant" in Romans 11:29, since "Old Covenant" has always had one specific meaning in our Catholic tradition, the juridical Mosaic covenant. Those who try to play word games with Romans 11:29 or put words in the verse that St. Paul never used, are doing a great disservice to the Catholic community. It has caused great confusion in the minds of laymen, and it has led some Cardinals (Keeler, Kasper, Willebrands, George, et al) to claim that the Jews still have their Old Covenant with God for salvation apart from Christianity. Paul used "Old Covenant" precisely once in his epistles, and there it was equated entirely with the Mosaic covenant, which he said was defunct (2Cor 3:14). Let's stop confusing the issue by making Romans 11:29 say something it never said.

Lastly, for all those advocating a massive conversion of the last generation of Jews as if this was Catholic doctrine, please remember that there has been no official teaching from the Catholic Church that such is the case.

Second, those who make such extravagant predictions need to exegete Romans 11:25-29 properly, which means:

- (1) that they must not add words to the passage that are not there;
- (2) they must prove that the "fullness of the Gentiles" occurs prior to the Second Coming of Christ and not at the Second Coming;
- (3) they must show examples in Scripture where "hardness" is removed;
- (4) they must show how Romans 11:26's reference to the "Deliverer" (or Is 59:20's reference to the "Redeemer") does not apply to Christ at his First Coming;
- (5) they must incorporate the meaning of the Greek adverb "thus" in Romans 11:26, and cease making it mean "and after this";
- (6) they must, since it was asserted that Romans 9-11 is the capstone to Romans 1-8, deal with the basic distinction that Paul taught between a spiritual Jew and a mere physical Jew (Rm 2:28-29; 9:6; 11:5-10) and incorporate that truth into the exegesis of Romans 11:25-29;

- (7) they must provide evidence of passages that teach there will be a mass conversion of the last generation of Jews just prior to the Second Coming, but not beg the question by trying to use Romans 11:26 as the proof;
- (8) they must show why Paul takes great pains to say that the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in the salvation of the remnant (Romans 11:1-14) if this doesn't have any bearing on how we are to understand the salvation of "all Israel" in vr. 26;
- (9) they must show by official documentation from Scripture, Tradition and Magisterium (not glib quotes from speeches) why "Old Covenant" is now being allowed to be inserted into Romans 11:29, when the passage is clear that it is the "gifts and call" which we normally associate with the Gospel, and which Gospel Paul mentions in 11:28;
- (10) they must show, if Paul is referring to the promises to Abraham in Romans 11:29, where do any of these promises indicate that there will be a mass conversion of the last generation of Jews;
- (11) they must show that, if one insists that Romans 11:26 is teaching a mass conversion of the last generation of Jews, why does Romans 11:23 insist that Jews can only be ingrafted back into the olive tree "if they do not remain in their unbelief";

These are just a few of the major questions that need to be addressed before any conclusions can be reached on Romans 11. Suffice it to say, Mr. Michael does not address them hardly at all, and as a result his exegesis of Romans 11 is wanting.

Once again, if anyone would like to take a stab at answering these questions and would like a response from me, please submit your challenges to me at cairomeo@aol.com. I will answer you promptly and put our dialogue up on our website. Please leave your full name (first and last), otherwise your challenge will be ignored.

Thank you,

Robert A. Sungenis, Ph.D.

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