

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

August 21, 2009 at 3:21pm

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## Jews warn Catholic bishops on interfaith talks

by Kevin Eckstrom by Kristen May by Religion News Service

WASHINGTON -- Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish leaders warned the nation's Catholic bishops that a June statement on whether Jews should convert to Christianity could make Jewish-Catholic dialogue "untenable."

In June, the bishops resurrected a 2002 statement on Jewish-Christian relations that they called "insufficiently precise and potentially misleading" about whether Christians should share the gospel with Jews.

The 2002 statement had said targeting Jews for conversion was "no longer theologically acceptable" because Jews "already dwell in a saving covenant with God." This summer, however, the bishops said that document had "raised many questions" among U.S. Catholics.

In an attempt to clarify their own position, the bishops said the church is "always giving witness to the following of Christ, to which all are implicitly invited." The bishops also said the "fulfillment of the covenant" God established with Israel "is found only in Jesus Christ."

In a letter released Thursday (Aug. 20), a coalition of Jewish groups said they may have to withdraw from ongoing interfaith dialogue if there is an "explicit or implicit" understanding that Jews must become Christians.

"A declaration of this sort is antithetical to the very essence of Jewish-Christian dialogue as we have understood it in the post-Vatican II era," said the letter from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis, as well as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee.

The letter -- the first collective Jewish response to the bishops' June statement -- seemed to indicate particular angst over the idea that the Jewish covenant with God is no longer valid.

"This appears to posit that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete and Judaism no longer has a reason to exist," the Jewish leaders said.

As part of their June statement, the bishops reaffirmed longstanding teaching that God "does not regret, repent of, or change his mind" about the covenant he established with the Jews through Abraham and Moses, but said Jesus "fulfills God's revelation."

Sister Mary Ann Walsh, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said the bishops are still examining the letter.

"Catholic-Jewish dialogue has been important to the U.S. bishops for almost 50 years," she said. "The bishops have just received the letter and currently are studying it."

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