

Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations

Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

National Conference of Catholic Bishops

March 1967

In its *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* of 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued an historic statement on the Jews and summoned all Catholics to re-appraise their attitude toward and relationship with the Jewish people. The Statement was, in effect, a culminating point of initiatives and pronouncements of recent pontiffs and of numerous endeavors in the Church concerned with Catholic-Jewish harmony. [It was also the point of convergence of many insights opened by Pope Paul's Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* and the Council's Constitution on the Church and Decree on Ecumenism.]

The call of the Council to a fraternal encounter with Jews may be seen, [further,] as one of the more important fruits of the spirit of renewal generated by the council in its deliberations and decrees. [Was it not indeed the Council's response to Pope John XXIII's famous words in which he embraced the Jewish people: "I am Joseph your brother"? (Gen 45:4). More specifically,] the Council's call is an acknowledgement of the conflicts and tensions that have separated Christians and Jews through the centuries and of the Church's determination, as far as possible, to eliminate them. It serves both in word and action as a recognition of the manifold sufferings and injustices inflicted upon the Jewish people by Christians in our own times as well as in the past. [The Statement] speaks from the highest level of the Church's authority to serve notice that injustices directed against the Jews at any time from any source can never receive Catholic sanction or support.

The message of the Council's statement is clear. Recalling in moving terms the "spiritual bond that ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock," the Fathers of the council remind us of the special place Jews hold in the Christian perspective, for "now as before God holds them as most

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dear for the sake of the patriarchs; he has not withdrawn his gifts or calling." Jews, therefore, the Fathers caution, are not "to be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from Holy Scripture." The Passion of Jesus, moreover, "cannot be attributed without distinction to all Jews then alive, nor can it be attributed to the Jews of today." The Church, the statement declares, "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and by anyone."

In light of these principles the Fathers enjoin that "all see to it that nothing is taught, either in catechetical work or in the preaching of the Word of God, that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ." . . .

10. The following themes which, among others, are viewed by Christian and Jew[ish experts] as important issues affecting Christian-Jewish relations merit the attention and study of Catholic educators and scholars:

- a. Scholarly studies and education[al] efforts . . . to show the common historical, biblical, doctrinal and liturgical heritage shared by Catholics and Jews, as well as their differences. . . .
- b. As the statement requires, the presentation of the Crucifixion story . . . in such a way as not to implicate all Jews of Jesus' time or of today in a collective guilt for the crime. . . .
- c. In keeping with the [Statement's] strong repudiation of anti-Semitism, a frank and honest treatment . . . in our history books, courses and . . . curricula . . . of the history of Christian anti-Semitism.
- d. [A study of the life of Jesus] and of the primitive Church in the setting of the . . . religious, social and cultural [features] of Jewish [life] in the first century.
- e. An explicit rejection . . . of the historically inaccurate notion that Judaism of that time, especially . . . Pharisaism, was a decadent formalism and hypocrisy[, well exemplified by Jesus' enemies]. . . .
- f. [An acknowledgment by] Catholic scholars [of] the living and complex reality of Judaism after Christ . . . and the permanent election of [Israel], alluded to by St. Paul (Rom 9:29), and [incorporation of] the results into Catholic teaching.

- g. [A full and precise explanation] of the use . . . of [the] expression “the Jews” by St. John and other New Testament references [which] appear to place all Jews in a negative light. (These expressions and references should be fully and precisely clarified in accordance with the intent of the . . . statement . . . that Jews are not to be “presented as rejected or accursed by God as if this followed from Holy Scripture.”)