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Discusses relationships between Christians and Jews on "Monitor"

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FRANK MCGEE: A most significant move was made this past week toward combating anti-Semitism in particular, and intolerance in general. This was a document drafted for consideration by the Roman Catholic Ecumenical Council, currently meeting in Rome. And the draft declares unjust and injurious the view that Jews, collectively, are responsible for the death of Christ. It says, rather, that all mankind must bear that responsibility. No date has been set for the start of debate on the draft of the document. It could be taken up before the current session ends on December 4<sup>th</sup>, or it could be delayed until next year. It would be premature, of course, to treat this document as though it already had been ratified by the council, but we feel that the mere consideration of such action is a major step toward eliminating interreligious friction. And seated with me now is Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum. He is the director of the Interreligious Affairs department of the American Jewish Committee. Good evening, Rabbi Tanenbaum.

MARC TANENBAUM: Good evening, Mr. McGee.

MCGEE: Now, first I would like to know, what is your reaction to this move on the part of the council, and what do you think its significance will be? [01:00] It's a two-part question.

TANENBAUM: Well, the decree itself has won a response from the Jewish community throughout the world which has characterized the decree as a historic turning-point in the relationships between Christians and Jews. I see it virtually as the basis of a reversal of 2,000 years of history. It is the cornerstone, it seems to me, of all kinds of new possibilities of friendship and mutual understanding between Catholics and Jews in various parts of the world. The decree, of course, is but the first stage in a long development, it seems to me, that this will take a considerable amount of activity in the future between Catholics and Jews to overcome inherited biases and prejudices of the past, and to replace these with more realistic and more humane attitudes between our two communities.

MCGEE: Well, listen, after all, of course it's not adopted, [02:00] and on that point, but having been brought just this far, could it ever be forgotten, could it ever be set back?

TANENBAUM: Well, the communiqué issued by Cardinal Bea's secretariat on Friday morning in relation to the introduction of the decree made very clear that this is now an official document of the church. The next stages are procedural stages. But in fact it is part of the legislative history of the Council.

MCGEE: I see.

TANENBAUM: So therefore it is an event of considerable historic significance already.

MCGEE: It is a statement. Now how do we implement it? What is likely -- not the mechanics by which it would be implemented, but what are some of the effects that it could bring, in actual day-to-day existence?

TANENBAUM: Well, in the first instance, the decree addresses itself to what has been the root cause of a great deal of misunderstanding about the Jews, namely the charge of the collective responsibility of the Jews for the death of Christ. I think the effect of the decree will be to restore to perspective [03:00] what has been the authentic teaching of the Church. On this score, the Council of Trent adopted a position back in the sixteenth century which said that all mankind, as you indicated before, is responsible for the death of Jesus. Now, many textbooks, liturgical commentaries, sermons have been preached which have

departed from this essential teaching. Very often have reflected cultural attitudes, have reflected attitudes that grew out of political crises and economic crises in which Jews were used as scapegoats. And found in these distorted teaching a sanction for having anti-Semitic attitudes. Well, this decree will remove the possibility of anyone who comes to the Church with anti-Semitic attitudes of finding sanction from the Church for such attitudes. Now, the practical consequences from this, as you questioned me about, are that it will call for considerable study on the part of leadership in the Church, examination of textbooks that are used [04:00] in diocese and parochial school systems, catechetical materials. It will, as the decree itself indicates from its paraphrase in the newspapers, admonish and alert preachers, teachers, to be sensitive to this essential authentic teaching of the Church from which they are called upon not to depart. The whole attitude of the ecumenical outreach, the emphasis on mutual reverence and mutual esteem, which was originally established by Pope John, and now all of us are grateful that this is being carried forward by Pope Paul VI with the tremendous spiritual leadership and support given by the great and saintly Cardinal Bea, who is head of the secretariat that introduced the decree.

MCGEE: Well, now, I appreciate that you may be a little reluctant to talk about some aspects of this, which you feel perhaps should come from Catholic sources, but I wonder if you could tell us something about your communications with Cardinal Bea.

TANENBAUM: Well, Cardinal Bea's secretariat was established by Pope John [05:00] of blessed memory in January 1959 after he announced the convening of the Council. Shortly after that time, Cardinal Bea turned in terms of his larger concerns of improving relations with Protestants and Eastern Orthodox to Protestant leadership, asking them to advise him on issues that they felt were sources of problems between Protestants and the Catholic Church. He likewise turned to leaders of the Jewish community, asking them, "What is it that the Church teaches, or what is it that it does, that is of concern to you?" And in that instance he turned to the American Jewish Committee.

MCGEE: I see.

TANENBAUM: Since that time, we have been in contact with him, have responded to his requests for information for materials, for research, for documentation. A number of our people have visited with him in Rome to discuss some of these questions. I had the privilege of meeting him in Boston when he was here in March of '63 at the chancery of

Cardinal Cushing, and subsequently [06:00] the American Jewish Committee arranged for an audience for a group of leading Jewish scholars and theologians in this country, that was held here at our building in New York City. It was a historic meeting, a meeting which revealed to all of our people the tremendous sincerity, humanity, and profound spirituality of Cardinal Bea. It was at that meeting, I believe, that we cemented the understanding which eventually has led, I think, to this tremendous affirmation of the rootedness of Christianity in Judaism, and the tremendous regard, as this proposed decree indicates, of the Catholic Church and the Catholic people for the living Jewish community today. And for this event, I think Jewish martyrs and prophets and sages have prayed over 1900 years.

MCGEE: We move very slowly. But we move sometimes.

TANENBAUM: We move. I hope exceedingly well.

MCGEE: Thank you very much, it's been a pleasure having you with us.

TANENBAUM: [07:00] I've enjoyed being with you, thank you.

MCGEE: We've been talking with Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, director of the department of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee. A few thoughts and reactions to a Vatican move which may ease friction on an interreligious level. Monitor, your information senator on NBC radio in

northeastern Pennsylvania, we're heard on WSCR, Scranton.  
Time now for all stations to take one minute on the Monitor  
beacon.

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