



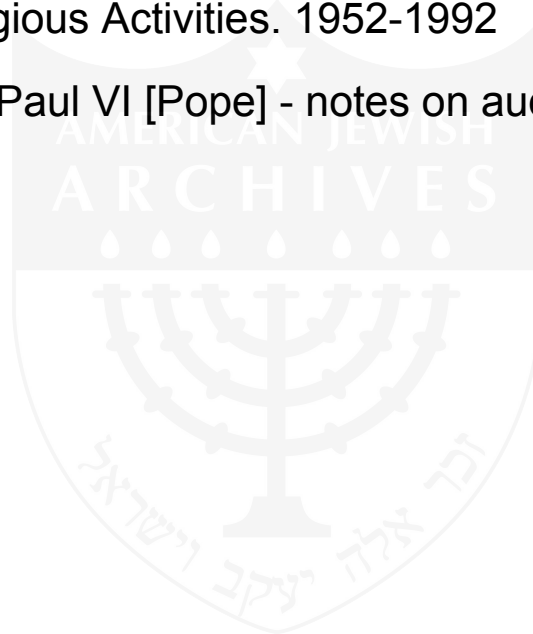
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Box 42, Folder 9, Paul VI [Pope] - notes on audience, 14
September 1964.



NOTES ON AUDIENCE WITH PAUL VI
SEPTEMBER 14, 1964

1. The audience was brought about through great pressures exerted by Cardinal Cushing, his diocesan official, Monsignor Edward Murray, and Mr. Sidney Raab (of Boston) and against the initial reluctance both of Cardinal Bea, Cardinal Cicognani, and of Pope Paul.

2. The appointment was initially fixed for Saturday, September 12, by the Maestro di Camera, Nazario Rocca. When informed that Dr. Heschel was not willing to travel on the Sabbath, Monsignor Murray cabled to Monsignor Rocca, who readily changed the appointed time and fixed the audience for Monday, the 14th of September, at 12:00 hours, a short time after the official opening of the third session of the Vatican Council.

3. We were received very cordially by the Pope in his private study. The Pope was in quite a relaxed mood. The only other person present besides myself, Dr. Heschel and the Pope, was a young American Monsignor Marcinkus, from the Secretariat of State, who acted as interpreter. Actually, apart from an odd English word for which the Pope asked a translation, the interpreter had nothing more to do.

4. Dr. Heschel sat at the side of the Pope's desk; I sat opposite the Pope across the desk; and the interpreter stood in the middle between Dr. Heschel and the Pope. Dr. Heschel wore a dark skullcap. The Pope was at ease, while Dr. Heschel sat on the edge of his chair, fidgeting, extremely tense, and betraying great nervousness.

5. Dr. Heschel began with a prayer in Latin and in Hebrew which lasted too long. The Pope, while looking appreciatively at the proceedings, gave clear impression of wanting to begin the substance of the conversation.

6. Dr. Heschel then began to present the subject. His introduction to what he wanted to say was too long, obsequious in manner, repetitious in addressing the Pope innumerable times as "Your Holiness", and lacked point and clarity. The face of the Pope betrayed that he did not reckon the style and the introduction as worth much in relation to the central subject of the proposed audience. Heschel's introduction also contained superfluous and repeated references to the acclaim that the Pope's addresses had had throughout the world. One felt that this was not the purpose of the visit and that the ceremonial should be already over and done with; that there was too much delay in grappling with the questions at hand.

7. After the first introductory remarks, the Pope said that he was ready to listen, but that we should remember that the Council was a deliberative body, one that made its own decisions, and that he cannot impose on it in any way. However, he said, he would be willing to transmit any viewpoint to the appropriate commission for ulterior consideration.

8. Dr. Heschel then brought his remarks to bear on the so-called "conversion" passage in the new text of the Jewish document. The statement in this passage, Dr. Heschel said, is bound to defeat the purpose which this important declaration set out to accomplish. Dr. Heschel then quoted the passage as stating that the Church has "unchanging hope" and "ardent desire" that the Jews will enter the Church. The Pope first expressed some bewilderment at this remark. When Dr. Heschel repeated his assertion that the passage would create a bad impression on public opinion, the Pope replied politely but forcefully, articulating each word clearly: "this document, like all the documents of the Vatican Council, is addressed to the followers of the Catholic Church and it expresses the religious beliefs of that Church. No one outside the Church is obligated to accept and to follow the dogmas proposed by Catholicism." Then addressing himself directly to Dr. Heschel, he said: "You do not have to accept it, but we have to state our beliefs and what is taught by Scripture."

9. These remarks of the Pope evidently were meant to close off any further conversation and discussion and, indeed, as things were, the discussion at this point should have been closed off. However, Dr. Heschel repeated his remarks and then said that he consented to the fact that the Church has a right to believe what it wants to believe and to express itself as it wishes. However, said Dr. Heschel, from a public relations point of view (and Dr. Heschel specifically used these words) the "conversion" passage would have a bad effect.

I confess that at this point of Dr. Heschel's remarks my eyes sank to the ground because I heard a Jew speaking to the head of the Catholic Church and bring in such irrelevant, unsuitable and alien considerations as public relations in a matter of the highest religious import and significance. I felt that he had introduced an absolutely incongruous element into a meeting conceived as a solemn confrontation between a representative of the Jewish people and Jewish interests and the august head of the Catholic Church.

10. Dr. Heschel at this point gave signs of frustration; he evidently had no new line of development for the argument. And it proceeded from this point to degenerate into a repetition not only of the same thoughts but of the same words. He kept on returning again and again to obsequious remarks, pointing out the great public role the Council had assumed in the world, and that the passage, as it stood, would be misunderstood. He had no reasoning, however, to apply to the Pope's argument. After this, as I have said, there was merely circular repetition of words without any new content.

11. The Pope then made two additional remarks. Firstly, too much pressure from the outside had been exerted already, he said, and if such were to continue, then there would be danger (the Pope's very words) that the entire declaration would have to be tabled. Dr. Heschel continued with the same repetitiousness and with an obviously increased tension in his manner and giving the impression that he was squirming on the edge of his chair.

This was not, certainly, the atmosphere of a calm talk between two top-flight negotiators on a matter of moment and importance. I recall definitely that I began to feel very frustrated and unhappy at being called upon to witness such a fruitless and empty conversation. We were consuming the Pope's time at such an important moment of the Council's opening, without being able to make any substantial contribution to the problem at hand.

12. I must also record that throughout all this the Pope remained a model of patience, of diplomatic refinement, of unusual forbearance (he could at any given moment have refused to listen any more to mere repetition and called the audience to a halt) and he gave no indication of the strict time-limits which are normally imposed on such audiences. This, in my mind, is an indication of the attitude which the Pope had on coming into an audience: he expected to be faced with a topflight negotiator who would argue his case as skillfully as he, the Pope, had prepared and argued his side of the story. He remained smiling, he spoke in clear and precise language. He knew what he wanted to say and he said it at each point. He made no hint of possible concessions or compromise with regard to the substance of the argument.

13. When this repetitious character of the conversation was prolonged beyond bearing point, there came a moment of great pain and distress for me personally. The young interpreter, Monsignor Marcinkus, (whose actions I do not condone in any way) could no longer contain himself in view of the ludicrous behavior of Dr. Heschel, and he began to mimic and imitate Dr. Heschel's gestures and manner of talking, with his head bent forward and his squirming manner on the edge of the chair. He also looked at me from behind Dr. Heschel's line of vision and asked me by his glance how long more this pantomime must continue, shrugging his shoulders and smiling in a derisive fashion; I recall that my only and most forceful wish at this moment was that the audience would be brought to a merciful close and that I could depart from the Pope's study.

14. I had felt, however, that Dr. Heschel had taken up one point to the exclusion of all others, and this was not the only point in the text of the declaration on which some discussion must be had -- if possible. The point of the conversion passage had been mentioned repetitiously by Dr. Heschel and without any sound reasoning behind his words except the appeal to the very crass motive of public relations and the publicity which things would receive. He showed no sign of turning to the problem of deicide -- in itself a capital point and one, after all, on which the substance of the basic anti-Semitic accusations against Jews rested. The phrasing of this passage on deicide in the new version of the declaration was, according to the judgment of all competent people, quite catastrophic because it practically came out and accused the Jews of Christ's time, all the Jews of his time, of being Christ-killers.

15. Almost abruptly, then, as much for the sake of breaking an almost nerve-wracking repetitiousness and helplessness of the conversation as for the sake of touching on a vital point of the declaration, I broke in in French. The

Pope speaks French with greater ease and facility than English, although his English was quite intelligible and correct. I posed the question that this passage might give rise to some misunderstandings and provoke wrong ideas about the Jews of Christ's time. The Pope's answer was that this view of the Jews was again based on the Scriptures. Hearing this point of view, I knew that there was no point in continuing our discussing this subject: the Pope had stated his point of view and there was no issue in sight.

16. At this moment, I thought that the Pope would call the audience to an end. But he was ready apparently to listen to further arguments and discussion, but none were forthcoming. Finally, in a state of near exhaustion, Dr. Heschel presented a copy of his own book on the Prophets. The Pope looked, not at the jacket (on which the author had put an endorsement from Protestant theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr) fortunately, but at the dedication on the fly-leaf which he read and remarked that it was very beautiful. (He then presented us with two medals as souvenirs.)

17. Before parting, Dr. Heschel came closer to the Pope and said to him: "If Your Holiness in the future should need any advice on matters affecting Jews and Judaism, I should be more than willing to offer my services in this respect." The Pope was silent for a moment as though not grasping the meaning of Dr. Heschel's remarks. Then he said: "Yes, Rabbi Zolli was a very good friend of mine and I knew him very well." Dr. Heschel was flabbergasted and visibly taken aback at this reaction of the Pope to his remark, and obviously did not know how to interpret it. (Zolli was the Chief Rabbi of Rome who converted to Catholicism soon after the war.) To me the meaning of the Pope's remark was quite clear: "We don't need your advice. We know where to go for advice." I felt a deep distress at the apparently pointed indelicacy of the Pope's reference to Rabbi Zolli. But Dr. Heschel had no justification in offering his services; it was tactless and uncalled for and lacking in self-dignity. I intimately felt that the Pope had issued a pointed rejection of any help such as Dr. Heschel might offer but that this was not realized by the latter.

18. Immediately afterwards and for at least 24 hours after the conversation with the Pope and Dr. Heschel's departure for the United States, I was in a numb state and overcome with depression. A magnificent occasion had been lost. What had struck me with dismay, real dismay, was the fact that Jewish religion had been represented and portrayed to the Pope in such an obsequious and unworthy manner. The demeanor and the words used were shot through with a transparent weakness, were below any reasonable standard.

This was all the more evident as we were confronted by the Pope who had acted as a superb diplomat, a brilliant parliamentarian. Dr. Heschel, (I am sorry for the expression, but it is the only one which describes actually and accurately what happened) used a whining, pleading tone, on a low level of appeal. In addition, his only real argument against the conversion passage was based on the idea and the words 'public relations'. To make an appeal to

to the religious head of the Catholic Church based on public relations was laughable if it were not tragic and quasi-sacrilegious. For the subject discussed was sacred. The effect of all this was that for the remainder of Dr. Heschel's stay in Rome I spoke only the strictly necessary to him. And I recall definitely that on leaving the Vatican, the words that came spontaneously to my mind and lips were chillul hashem veyisrael (the desecration of God's name and of Israel).

19. It was then no surprise to me when I was told by unimpeachable sources in the Vatican that the Pope, in speaking to Cardinal Bea about the audience with Dr. Heschel, said: "I thought that I would have to negotiate with a man worthy of himself and of his religion. However..." Nor was it surprising to me when another confirmation of the same thing came to me from Msgr. Edward Murray who had taken a great part in arranging the audience, but gave a report to this Monsignor of the audience, but in doing so I omitted the negative elements and concentrated on the few positive elements -- the Pope's cordiality, the friendliness and benignity of the reception which was given to us. I omitted any mention of the elements which had depressed me so much. When Mr. Sidney Raab of Boston arrived some days later he told me that Monsignor Murray had refused to show him a report (drawn up by the Pope) on the audience, saying that "it would be better not to show to you." There is no need to elaborate on what the report contained, as I was a witness to what had transpired.

20. Dr. Heschel left a memorandum with the Pope before he left, and the Pope kindly promised to transmit it to the appropriate body. The memorandum only repeated what had been said by Dr. Heschel during the interview. I find it strange, however, that the only source-reference quoted in this memorandum is St. Paul; the Pope is the head of the authoritative religious body, the Catholic Church, which claims to be the sole interpreter of what St. Paul meant and means for men. To cite St. Paul in support of an opposite thesis to that of the Pope is to challenge the Pope's claim to be the unique authority.

21. To summarize all this in a few words. Dr. Heschel's manner, first of all, was replete with obsequious repetitious traits, reminding one of some miserable man coming to plead with the great for his few possessions. His arguments were nil except for the egregious blunder and indelicacy of appealing to a Madison Avenue motive for changing what the Pope stated openly to be immutable Catholic doctrine.

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