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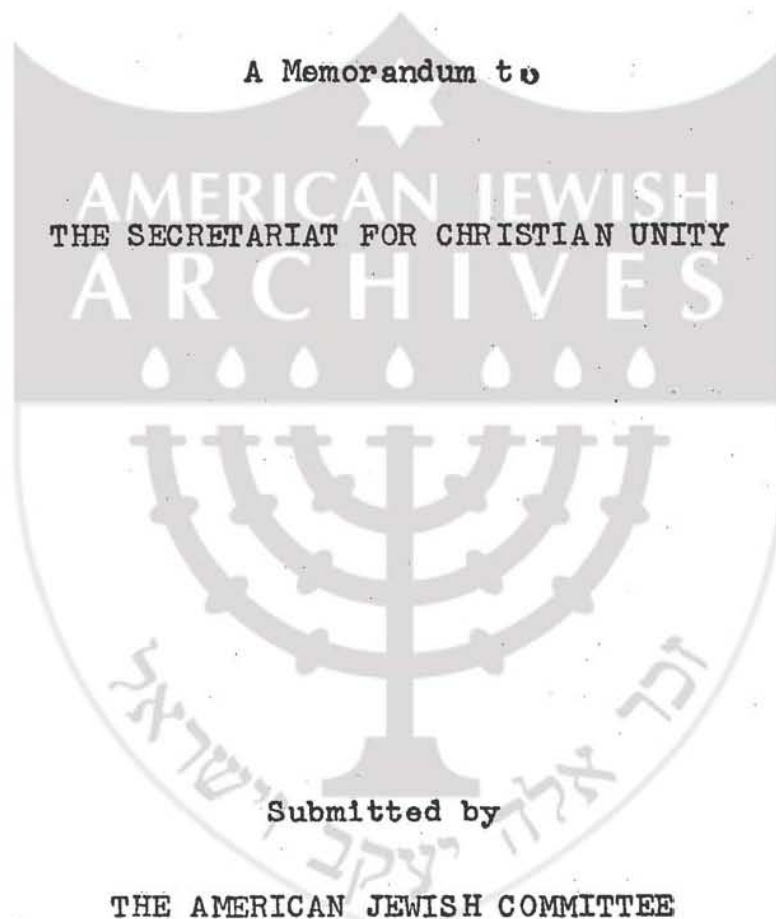
Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 1, Folder 13, "Anti-Jewish Elements in Catholic Liturgy", 17
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ANTI-JEWISH ELEMENTS IN CATHOLIC LITURGY



New York

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I THE JEWS IN CATHOLIC LITURGY

In submitting this memorandum to the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, we are motivated by the same desire that prompted our earlier* memorandum on "The Image of the Jews in Catholic Teaching" - the desire to improve relations between Catholics and Jews. It is our hope that the present document, which focuses upon certain passages in Catholic liturgy which we consider prejudicial to Jews, will be accepted by the Secretariat as a constructive attempt to confront sources of misunderstanding and hostility between Catholics and Jews.

Attitudes communicated to Catholics in the public worship of the Church are deeply implanted and are supported by the authority of the Church and the solemn majesty of the service. Thus, when we call attention in this memorandum to passages in Roman Catholic liturgy which are hostile to Jews, we do so on the assumption that these passages, and the commentaries they have traditionally elicited, contribute to anti-Jewish attitudes and behavior -- an assumption unfortunately justified by Jewish historic experience.

*

Submitted to His Eminence Augustin Cardinal Bea, July 13, 1961.

Recent Changes in the Liturgy

We acknowledge with appreciation that recent changes have been made in the liturgy of the Church with a view toward effecting more positive understanding of the Jewish people and Judaism on the part of Catholics; i.e., the removal in 1955 of the special rubric which made the Jews the only exception to the rule of flectamus genua -- a rubric that was greatly offensive to Jews who were aware of it and knew its intention was to humiliate them; the specification by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, in 1948, that the expressions perfidis Judaeis and Judaica perfidia may be translated as signifying simply a lack of faith in the Christian revelation; and finally, the elimination of the words perfidia and perfidis by Pope John in 1959, and the subsequent authorization of this change by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Nevertheless, anti-Jewish passages remain within Catholic liturgy. These are found in:

- 1) liturgical books of the Church, such as Missale, Graduale, Vesperale, Antiphonale, etc. which serve the public worship in parish churches and cathedrals;
- 2) homilies and officially approved commentaries upon the public liturgy, which guide and inform the priest in the preparation of his sermon;
- 3) texts belonging to the monastic ritual, or to the Breviary or to obsolete ordines or sacramentaries;
- 4) so-called para-liturgical tracts.

In this memorandum we have limited our consideration to the first two categories, which are directly related to the public worship of the Church, although numerous anti-Jewish passages and interpretive remarks may be found in the third category¹ and in para-liturgical tracts, particularly in devotional materials prepared locally by sodalities, fraternities, etc.

1. E.g. "Dicant nunc Judaei, quomodo milites custodientes sepulcrum perdiderunt Regem ad lapidis positionem. Quare non servabant Petram justitiae? Aut sepultum reddant, aut resurgentem adorent, nobiscum dicentes: 'Quod enim, vivit, vivit Deo, Alleluia'." (Hymn "Christus resurgens", Vesperale juxta ritum S. Ordinis Praedicatorum, Romae 1900, ed. Fruehwirth, p. 190/1)

"Let the Jews say, how the soldiers, who guarded the sepulchre, gave away the body of the King, according to the (changed) position of the tomb-stone. Why did they not serve the rock of justice? They should have either put back the stone, or adored the resurgent (Christ), saying with us: 'For he is alive, alive with God, Alleluia'".

"Erubescat Judaeus infelix qui dicit Christum ex Joseph semine esse natum." (Ibid., p. 433)

"May the wretched Jew blush for saying that Christ was born out of the seed of Joseph".

"Sit etiam signorum sonitus, Domine, Judeis et perfidis terrificatio valida resipiscenda a malitia..." (Liber ordinum, ed. Férotin, Paris, 1904) This is, according to Férotin, the oldest formula for the blessing of bells.

"Let also their clamorous sounding, (of the bells) be a strong deterrent to Jews and traitors, lest they take courage for new wickedness..."

"Lugeat carnalis Judaeus, sed spiritalis gaudeat Christianus..." (Ibid., p. 423)

"Let the carnal Jew mourn, but the spiritual Christian may rejoice..."

Within the public worship of the Church, there are a number of passages and statements expressing hostility to the Jewish people. For the most part, these are found in the New Testament lectionaries. Occasionally, a hostile comment drawn from the New Testament actually becomes a part of the Mass. For example. "Tradent enim vos in conciliis, et in synagoga suis flagellabunt vos..." (Commune Apostolorum et Evangelistarum, Vesperale Rom.) "They will hand you over in meetings and in their synagogues they will whip you..." This phrase is repeated during the Mass on the occasion of every memorial day of an Apostle or Evangelist.

In addition, some medieval hymns, several of which are still in liturgical use, are particularly prejudicial to Jews. We quote only a few instances:

Wipo's sequence for Easter (Victimae paschali laudes):
Credendum est magis solae Mariae veraci
Quam Judaeorum turbae fallaci

You should put more trust in Mary, the true one,
Than in the horde of lying Jews.

Guilelmus Secundus: (Meditationes circa mysteria
passionis Domini):
Judaei Jesum Reum Mortis Conclamant.

Bos herum noscit rationis expers
Sedulo impensas redimens labore;
Te suum quaerit scelerata proles
Perdere Patrem.

The Jews demand that Jesus be condemned to death.

Even a slave, stupid as an ox, recognizes his
master and repays his expense with useful work;
But this heinous brood would fain
Ruin Thee, their Father!

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IV CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sacra enim Liturgia ut humanis, ita divinis constat elementis; haec autem, ut patet, cum a Divino Redemptore constituta fuerint, nullo modo ab hominibus mutari possunt; illa vero, prout temporum, rerum animorumque necessitates postulant, varias commutationes habere possunt, quas Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, S. Spiritus auxilio innixa, comprobaverit... inde progrediens incrementum proficiscitur, quo peculiare excolendae religionis consuetudines ac peculiaria pietatis opera pedetemptim evolvuntur, et quorum tenue dumtaxat iudicium superioribus aetatibus habebatur....

....Ita pari modo, cum de sacra Liturgia agitur, qui ad antiquos redire ritus consuetudinesque velit, novas repudiando normas, quae ex providentis Dei consilio ob mutatas rerum condiciones fuere inductae, non is procul dubio, ut facile cernere est, sapienti rectoque movetur studio.

Pius XII, Encycl. "Mediator Dei", pars IV.

We follow here the officially endorsed paraphrase given by C.R.A. Cunliffe of these celebrated passages from the Papal encyclical:

In 'Mediator Dei' the Pope distinguishes between the divine elements in the liturgy, which can never be changed, and the human elements of the liturgy, which were devised by the Church and are subject to change by her authority. The purpose of the latter is to engender in those who are to receive grace through the divine elements of the liturgy the optimum dispositions which will enable them to profit to the full.¹

Of the passages which we have considered in this memorandum regarding the liturgy of the triduum, the Improperia and the lessons from St. Augustine's treatise on the Psalms are of human origin and character. Equally of human origin are the commentaries and homilies on the liturgy, whether written for educational or devotional purposes.

1. C.R.A. Cunliffe, English in the Liturgy, London, 1956, pg.50

In the interest of better relations between the adherents of the historical monotheistic religions, we request the Church to seek ways of mitigating the impact of the liturgy of the triduum. Were the Church to select passages which would accurately convey its true attitude toward the Jewish people, or to produce or stimulate authoritative interpretation or commentary which would, for once and for all, lift the charge or implication of deicide from the Jewish people, it would make a great contribution to increased understanding between Catholics and Jews.

Most Jews are profoundly convinced that the charge of deicide, uttered throughout the centuries has been a central factor in the persistent anti-Semitism of Western civilization.

Serious and thoughtful Catholic scholars have agreed that misinterpretations of Catholic scripture and teachings -- misinterpretations sometimes spread among the populace by ecclesiastics and church documents -- contributed to anti-Jewish prejudice up to, and including, the present. Yet, in a commentary on the Improperia written in 1950, only five years after the greatest planned slaughter in human history, we encounter the term "deicide," quite clearly intended to apply to the Jews, written by a responsible and learned Catholic author.¹

1. Cf. comment by Louis Bouyer: "...quand bien même ceux qui en sort l'objet ne lui répondent que par des rebuffades, et finalement par le deicide..." (supra p.15)