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paths to AGAPÉ

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AGAPÉ IS THE GREEK WORD FOR LOVE. As used by the Christians of the early Church, it was the name given to the "fraternal love feast"

which normally accompanied the religious service of the Eucharist (thanksgiving over the bread and wine). While possibly based on the *chaburah*, a type of solemn fraternal banquet held among Jewish religious societies in ancient Palestine, the *agapé* became for early Christians a formalized act of personal good-will and assumed a semi-liturgical character. Only those who were members of the Church

shared in the love feast which—according to Church Father Tertullian (ca. 165-245 CE)—included, in addition to a modest meal, a general discussion, the reading of Biblical passages, the singing of Psalms, or “unfettered speech.”

On January 14, 1962, an *agapé* was held in Rome, virtually under the eaves of the Vatican. Arranged by the Pro Deo University for Social and International Studies, this *agapé* was a significant demonstration, both symbolically and substantively, of the new openness and outreach that increasingly characterizes the present-day relationships among religious leaders. For the first time in history, representatives of fifteen non-Roman Catholic religious groups took part in a Roman Catholic-sponsored “fraternal *agapé*.” Present were Anabaptists, Anglicans, Baptists, Buddhists, Calvinists, Confucians, Coptic Orthodox, Hindus, Jews, Lutherans, Methodists, Muslims, Presbyterians, Russian Orthodox, and Waldensians.

The assembly commenced with celebration of a Mass which the non-Catholic representatives attended as observers. There followed a dinner that began with a non-sectarian prayer asking for Divine help “so that each one of us, overcoming and repudiating our differences and the adversities which poison human relations, will spread all around us the seeds of goodness and become messengers of love and life.”

One of the highest churchmen in the Vatican, Augustin Cardinal Bea, delivered the keynote address. Cardinal Bea is President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, one of the fifteen commissions designated by Pope John XXIII in preparation for the forthcoming Ecumenical Council and the secretariat which is concerned with Catholic-Jewish relations. Before this pluralistic group, Cardinal Bea declared that “there is a basic unity among all believers” and that “all men have the same dignity and value before God.” He said that “the great challenge to our generation is the problem of group antagonism” and that “it is the primordial duty of all groups of mankind to unite for the purpose of overcoming hatreds of the past.”

Among those who were invited to comment on the Cardinal’s address were Dr. Elio Toaff, Chief Rabbi of Rome, and Zachariah Shuster, director of the American Jewish Committee’s European office. Both Dr. Toaff and Mr. Shuster asserted that Jews have a particular stake in this manifestation of solidarity, for they were the greatest victims of prejudices and antagonisms through the ages, and particularly during the recent holocaust. Dr. Toaff and Mr. Shuster supported Cardinal Bea’s appeal, as did other non-Catholics; to form a common front to overcome racial and religious hostilities and to promote greater understanding and mutual acceptance.

Archbishop Ettore Cunial, Deputy General to the Vicar of Rome, concluded the meeting, saying, “a similar *agapé* forty years ago would have been incon-

ceivable. This would mark the beginning of increased interreligious collaboration."

To observers of the interreligious scene on both global and national levels this steady march during the last half century toward progressively increased cooperation and solidarity among the major religious communities has been little short of astounding. Conditioned to a reading of interreligious history that has been dominated from its earliest days by power rivalries, heresy hunting, and mutual oppressions, some continue to regard all the ecumenical talk and activity with skepticism. To these skeptics, the new extension of the *agapé* spirit to all believers is mainly a defensive response to a vast complex of threatening forces: the massive threat of communism, the competitive missionary enterprises of renascent Oriental religions, the rejection of Christianity as an outpost of Western imperialism on the part of the newly emerging nations of Asia and Africa, and the corrosive influences of materialism and secularism on church adherents.

Indeed, it is evident that these global geo-political and social forces constitute some of the factors that have brought religious leaders to a radical self-examination. However, close association with Catholic and Protestant leaders as well as a careful scrutiny of their literature are persuasive beyond argument that the churches are experiencing an ecumenical revolution that is pro-

foundly spiritual, and is reflected in Biblical, Liturgical, and Theological reformations. Space limitations do not allow here the development of this point; generally, it is sufficient to note that these internal religious reforms are providing a radically new basis for dialogues between Catholics, Protestants, and Jews.

Christian leaders are seeking to overcome the formalisms and archaisms which have accumulated over the centuries in order to relate the teaching and institutions of the church to the realities of the nuclear age and the pluralistic world. They have begun to examine deeply the history of the early Church in Palestine and in the Dispersion. What were the sources of the apostolic strength of the first four centuries of the "original" Church which enabled it to convert an empire and to subdue a paganism as powerful in its own day as communism is in ours? That search into history has inevitably brought present day Christian scholars and thinkers into an unprecedented confrontation with such questions as the relations of Jesus to the Jewish people, the early Church to the Synagogue, the Church Fathers to the Synagogue Fathers, and the Jewish understanding of the Bible and the Prophetic tradition.

The growing consciousness of indebtedness to the Jews as "elders in the faith," joined with a recognition of responsibility for the prevalence of anti-Semitism in the Christian cultures of the

Western world, have resulted in a unique receptivity to the Jewish people, and a desire to eliminate anti-Semitism in Christian teaching and behavior.

Conscious that this is a special moment filled with opportunity to advance intergroup understanding, the American Jewish Committee has been an active partner in seeking to advance this new spirit of interreligious *agapé*. In many instances, the Committee has responded to approaches made to us by the highest authorities in the Catholic and Protestant worlds. In other instances, we have taken the initiative where we felt the need to present a particular AJC human relations concern. The record of the growing constructive interchanges between Christian leaders and ourselves on international, national, and local levels, is a rich one and too lengthy to be detailed here. But the following highlights of our interreligious work during the past year should be suggestive of the directions in which we are moving:

POPE JOHN XXIII—On the publication of the Papal Encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, AJC Executive Vice President Dr. John Slawson issued a statement commending Pope John for his vigorous affirmations of "human solidarity and brotherhood." The Catholic diocesan press gave wide coverage to the statement. Significantly, expressions of "appreciation and gratitude" for the AJC statement were received from Cardinal Cushing of Bos-

ton, Cardinal McIntyre of Los Angeles, Cardinal Spellman of New York, Cardinal Ritter of St. Louis, the late Cardinal Muench of the Vatican, and other U.S. national Catholic leaders. The National Catholic Conference on Social Action invited AJC and the National Council of Churches to join in a study of the social and economic principles of the Encyclical.

WORLD COUNCIL—The World Council of Churches, representing some 300 million Protestant and Orthodox adherents, at its New Delhi meeting last December, adopted a strong resolution denouncing anti-Semitism as "a sin against God and man." Its statement added: "In Christian teaching the historic events which led to the Crucifixion should not be so presented as to fasten upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which belong to our corporate humanity and not to one race or community."

"THE CATHOLIC HOUR"—The National Council of Catholic Men produced a series on its NBC-TV "The Catholic Hour" devoted to "Prejudice U.S.A." The Oct. 15, 1961 program, entitled "The Chosen People," made an impressive appeal to the Christian conscience to combat anti-Semitism. The AJC was privileged to serve as consultant in the preparation of the script.

SPAIN—At the invitation of the President of the Madrid Jewish community, Max Mazin, the AJC European office arranged for Father Paul Démann, French pre-

late who has made major contributions to improving Catholic-Jewish relations, and Maximo Yagupsky, a former director of the AJC Latin American office, to address meetings of Spanish Catholics and Jews. With the approval of ecclesiastical authorities, a joint Catholic-Jewish action group, *Amistad Judeo-Christiana* was organized. The Catholic Information Center published a Spanish pamphlet, *Nosotros los Judios* (We, The Jews) which sharply criticizes "teaching of contempt" about Jews.

PRO DEO—In Jan. 1962, AJC announced the establishment of a chair in intergroup relations at Pro Deo University in Rome, the first of its kind at any university in Europe. Dr. Eugene Hevesi, of AJC Foreign Affairs staff, is professor.

RELIGIOUS TEXTS—The findings of the Protestant self-study of religious education textbooks as sources of intergroup understanding or prejudice, conducted by Dr. Bernhard Olson at Yale University Divinity School, will be published by Yale University Press, Sept. 1962. Dr. Olson, a faculty member at Union Theological Seminary, is working with denomination curriculum planners and textbook writers who are incorporating his findings in their new teaching materials. St. Louis

University's self-study of Catholic textbooks has just been completed and the results have been made available to the major publishers of Catholic textbooks. The Jewish self-study at Dropsie College is scheduled for completion in April 1962. AJC, which has been involved in textbook studies since 1930, has served as a co-operating agency with each of these institutions.

CATHOLIC PRESS—AJC's Program Director, David Danzig, addressed the Catholic Press Association in Providence, R. I., on improving intergroup relations through the religious press. The editor of the Providence Visitor publicly deplored "the defective teaching of Christians about Jews."

INTERRACIAL JUSTICE—The National Catholic Council for Interracial Justice at its Aug. 1961 convention in Detroit adopted a resolution vigorously condemning anti-Semitism. The resolution proposed a program for exchange visits to churches and synagogues, and exchange of speakers at Catholic and Jewish schools. A followup program on a local level was discussed by AJC with the director of NCCIJ. An AJC representative attended the Detroit meeting as fraternal delegate.

Thus wind the paths to *agapé*...