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THE ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

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It should be said at the very outset that there is considerable confusion in the use of the term "Ecumenical"; confusion both within Christendom, as well as confusion between Christianity and Judaism. In its strictest technical sense, the term "Ecumenical" applies to relationships between Christians - between Catholics, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox - and the ground of Ecumenism is the shared Christology which is particular to Christendom. It is a misnomer and a misapplication of the term Ecumenism to apply it to relations between Christians and Jews. One can apply it, of course, to Christian-Jewish relations in its broadest, most generic sense; but in its authentic theological meaning it is a term specifically applicable to relations within Christendom. In this application, it deals with the activities of Cardinal Bea's Secretariat relating to the reunion of the "separated brethren." Yet having said that, at the same time one cannot really explore nor exhaust the full meaning of what Ecumenism means in its ultimate reaches without its application to relations between Christians and Jews, since the Hebrew Bible is the foundation of all monotheism. But for reasons of clarity, it is probably wise and prudential that we use the term "inter-religious relationships" to describe the relations between Christianity and Judaism and between Christians and the Jewish people.

It is appropriate, I think, to ask the question, "Why is it that the Jewish decree that was introduced at the second session of the Ecumenical Council last November, 1963, and which has come before the third session of the Council, has elicited such widespread universal attention?"

As Cardinal Bea said in his relatio (introduction) on September 25, at the time of his introduction of the "Jewish declaration,"

"I can only begin with the fact that this Declaration certainly must be counted among the matters in which public opinion has shown the greatest concern. Scarcely any other schema has been written up so much and so widely in periodicals . . . Many will judge the Council good or bad by its approval or disapproval of the Declaration."

This decree has engaged the concern and the attention of 2,300 Council Fathers in Rome over a period of three years. It has involved, to my great interest and fascination as I witnessed in Rome over several weeks, the attention of the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox observers. Why? Why is the issue of

the relationship of Christianity to Judaism and the practical relations between Christians and Jews on a daily level of such central significance? Why has it attracted such widespread attention?

It is my thesis that the issue of relations between Christians and Jews has reached the point of ripeness, a point of maturation in a way that can be seen analogously in terms of the ripeness and the fullness which relations between the Negro and white societies have reached. The moment of crisis, or the moment of truth, in relations between the Negro and the white persons are being tested and resolved to the degree to which we maximize racial justice for our Negro citizens. In the process of being confronted by Negroes with a challenge to our moral conscience, and in terms of our attitudes and behavior toward the Negroes, we have begun to find it necessary to confront the fact that we have been dealing with Negroes in the main as abstractions, as mythic perceptions but not as real people; not as persons who have human dignity, which demands a certain response from us as brothers. One of the facts that has become very clear to us is that we have evaded our moral duties to the Negro by substituting a series of myths for genuine confrontation. These myths have buffered us from confronting the reality of the Negro. Underlying all the issues in the civil rights struggle - education, employment opportunities, public accommodations and housing - as we dig beneath the surface of our attitudes and feelings, we find that in each instance we have developed a mythology which has crippled us from coming to grips with realities. Thus, we have told ourselves, literally for 350 years, that the Negroes are illiterate, the Negroes have weak family life, the Negroes are lazy and unreliable, and, perhaps the most diabolic myth of all, the Negroes have a bad odor. We have told ourselves that the Negroes are illiterate, refusing to want to face up to the fact that by the year 1830, every state in the South had passed a law proscribing, prohibiting Negroes from learning to read or write because of the fear that a literate, educated Negro would rise up in rebellion against his white master, the plantation baron. And so now we justify our segregation in schools by saying the Negro never learned to read or write; he is illiterate and therefore he cannot have equal education opportunity. We have broken up Negro families, we have used Negro women for breeding purposes, we have sold them "down the river" to the plantations of Louisiana, and we have destroyed the foundations of Negro family life - and now we use this as an excuse for saying that Negroes cannot live next door to us because of their family habits. We have prevented Negroes from getting certain forms of employment and we have justified this by saying that they are lazy, shiftless, unreliable, the Step'n Fetchit image. Then we have kept Negroes away from public accommodations because of their "bad odor." But as Gunnar Myrdal said, "This has never prevented us from using Negroes as porters or as people who run our houses for us as maids."

Now in many ways the mythology, the unreality, the capacity to abstract human relationships and to empty them of solid human meaning and feeling finds

its analogy in the relations between Christians and Jews. What we have begun to confront in the relationships between Christianity and Judaism and between Christendom and Jews is the fact that there is a fundamental ambivalence historically and theologically within Christian teaching and within Christian social practice which we have begun to face in a way that has never been confronted before in the past nineteen hundred years of the Christian-Jewish encounter. Just as the social revolution of the Negroes today has caused us to confront the race issue in a way that we cannot escape, so certain revolutionary facts of the twentieth century have made the Christian-Jewish confrontation inescapable.

I believe that the Nazi holocaust and all that that has meant for the Christian conscience, as well as the tremendous needs of a new world of the 20th century in which Christians and Jews together find themselves increasingly a minority in relation to a non-White, non-Judeo-Christian world, are compelling us to confront the deep realities of the contact between Christians and Jews. Fundamentally, Christianity has never made up its mind as to where it stands in terms of its common patrimony with Judaism and its daily attitudes and relationships and behavior toward Jews. We find as we look into the history of the Christian-Jewish encounter for the greater part of the past two millennia that there have been teachings and episodes betokening the greatest of mutual respect and esteem between Christians and Jews. Thus, we find St. Athanasius, one of the early Church Fathers at the beginning of the fourth century, who said that "the Jews are the great school of the knowledge of God and the spiritual life of all mankind." St. Jerome, who lived in the fifth century and who spent forty years in Palestine where he studied in Caesarea with Jewish scholars and Biblical authorities the Holy Scriptures and the Masoretic traditions, from whom he obtained insights which affected his translation of the Scriptures into the Vulgate, declared that "the Jews were divinely preserved for a purpose worthy of God."

This side of the affirmative attitude of the Church toward the Jews reflected the tradition of St. Paul in Romans 9 to 11, which speaks of Christians being engrafted onto the olive tree of Israel (11:17) planted by God. This tradition also found expression in positive behavior of Popes, even in the Middle Ages. Thus, Pope Callixtus II issued a bull in 1120 beginning with the words "Sicut Judaeis" in which he strongly condemned the forced baptism of Jews, acts of violence against their lives and property, and the desecration of Synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. Pope Gregory IX issued the bull Etsi Judeorum in 1233 in which he demanded that the Jews in Christian countries should be treated with the same humanity as that with which Christians desire to be treated in heathen lands.

Side by side with that tradition there existed a tradition of hostility and contempt which the late French historian, Professor Jules Isaac, has written about in his various studies.^{1/} This tradition was perhaps most explicitly

embodied in the eight sermons of St. John Chrysostom, who in the year 387 spoke from the pulpits of the City of Antioch to the first congregations of early gentiles who became Christians, saying:

"I know that a great number of the faithful have for the Jews a certain respect and hold their ceremonies in reverence. This provokes me to irradicate completely such a disastrous opinion. I have already brought forward that the synagogue is worth no more than the theatre . . . it is a place of prostitution. It is a den of thieves and a hiding place of wild animals . . . not simply of animals but of impure beasts. . . . God has abandoned them. What hope of salvation have they left? They say that they too worship God but this is not so. None of the Jews, not one of them is a worshiper of God . . . Since they have disowned the Father, crucified the Son and rejected the Spirit's help, who would dare to assert that the synagogue is not a home of demons! God is not worshiped there. It is simply a house of idolatry . . . The Jews live for their bellies, they crave for the goods of this world. In shamelessness and greed they surpass even pigs and goats . . . The Jews are possessed by demons, they are handed over to impure spirits . . . Instead of greeting them and addressing them as much as a word, you should turn away from them as from a pest and a plague of the human race."

(This is an excerpt from Patrologica Graeca, as translated by Father Gregory Baum in his book, The Jews and the Gospels.)

Now, if one enters into the historic background and the context within which St. John Chrysostom made these remarks, perhaps one can understand a little better - one can explain if not excuse - what led St. John Chrysostom to make these remarks. It may be useful to take a moment to observe that the Church in the first four centuries of this era was struggling for its existence as an autonomous, independent faith community. In the minds of the Roman Empire the early Christians represented another Jewish sect. Judaism was the religio licita (a favored religion), and for early Christians to achieve any status, the right to conduct Christian ceremonials, they had to come as Jews to achieve recognition from the Romans. And so the early Church Fathers found it necessary to separate Christians from the Jews. The early Christians felt very close to Jews; observed their Sabbath on the Jewish Sabbath, their Easter on the Jewish Passover. At the time of the Council of Elvira, (ca.300)

many Christians thought the Jews had a special charisma as the People of God and therefore invited them to bless their fields in Spain so that they would be fruitful. To separate Christians from their associations with Judaism, to create a sense of autonomy and independence for Christianity, apparently in the wisdom of the early Church Fathers, it became necessary to embark on a drastic effort to break the bonds between Church and Synagogue and to give Christians a consciousness of difference from the Jews. In the process of this disidentification, however, the pattern of anti-Jewish attitudes and of anti-Jewish behavior, became so entrenched, that by the time the Church became the established religion of the Roman empire, these attitudes were reflected increasingly in ecclesiastical legislation. These laws subsequently led to the establishment of ghettos, yellow hats and badges, and in general, reduced Jews to the status of pariahs throughout the Roman empire. As the Church became the major institution integrating the whole of medieval society, the perception of the Jew within medieval Christendom became the perception of the Jew within Western culture and civilization.

Lest one think that these attitudes are mainly of academic or historic interest, one needs to confront the following facts. A prominent Catholic lay educator, Madam Claire Huchet Bishop, who lived in France during the Vichy period and who saw friends of hers participate in the deportation of Jews to concentration camps, with a kind of indifference and callousness which she could not reconcile with her Christian conscience, began to penetrate into a study of what it is that led Christians to this kind of indifference, this lack of compassion for Jews. She became a disciple of Jules Isaac, and then in this country began to travel around to various Christian seminaries and universities, to speak of the new understanding between Christians and Jews. As she sought to elaborate her thesis of the historical and theological factors which helped shape the conception of the Jew in the Western World, she received many questions from students at the end of her lectures. These are some of the questions that were asked of her by students in Catholic and Protestant seminaries and universities and on "secular" campuses:

"Madam Bishop, if the Jewish people did not kill Christ, who did?

"You said that the high priest and the elders and not the Jewish people had a share of responsibility in Jesus' condemnation. That is not true. The Gospel says that the people clamored for his death.

"I am a Catholic and I know what I have been taught when I went to Catechism; and that is that the Jews killed Christ. That is what my Church teaches. I don't like it. I have several friends who are Jewish, but what can I do? I have to believe my Church.

"Don't you think, Madam Bishop, that in this country we are antagonistic to Jews because they are too successful in business?"

"Why are all Jews rich?"

"Why are the Jews better than anyone else in business?"

"I have heard it said that Hitler had to do what he did because the Jews held all the money in Germany."

I must say at this point, listening to your reaction, this reminds me of a story about a Jewish man sitting in a subway in New York who was seen reading an anti-Semitic paper Common Sense. His friend beside him turned to him and said, "I don't understand you. Why are you reading this anti-Semitic paper?" He replied, "I get a great sense of satisfaction out of reading this anti-Semitic paper." The friend asked, "But don't you read Jewish papers?" He replied, "That's precisely the point. When I read a Jewish publication I learn about pogroms against the Jews, discrimination, persecution, how hard it is, how we're kept out of universities, medical schools, etc. Then I read this anti-Semitic paper and find out that the Jews are international bankers, financiers, how they control the world. I get a lift out of this."

These were the verbatim questions asked of Madam Bishop.

The St. Louis University study, conducted by the Jesuit institution of higher learning in St. Louis, in its examination of Catholic parochial school textbooks, found that there are echoes and resonances of this tradition of contempt in materials used even to this day. Thus, for example, to cite some of the teachings which have an unerring echo from the teachings of St. John Chrysostom, it is written in some of the religious textbooks studied by Sister Rose Albert:

"The Jews wanted to disgrace Christ by having him die on the cross."

"Show us that the Jews did not want Pilate to try Christ but to give permission for his death."

"When did the Jews decide to kill Christ?"

"The Jews as a nation refused to accept Christ and since that time they have been wandering on the earth without a temple or a sacrifice and without the Messiah."

The findings of the Yale University Divinity School study, published in book form as Faith and Prejudice by Dr. Bernhard E. Olson, have revealed analogous results in some of the denominational textbooks used in Protestantism. There have been significant revisions, and improved portrayals of Jews and Judaism in Catholic and Protestant teaching materials since the publication of the St. Louis and Yale studies. Nevertheless, there is still a heavy residuum from the polemical histories of the past in far too many textbooks, and above all, in sermons, religious radio broadcasts, and in fact in the daily attitudes of many professing Christians.

These studies, which are of interest, I think, to people who have professional religious and educational responsibilities do not begin, however, to make us aware of the consequence of these generations of teachings in terms of the impact they have had on the attitudes towards Jews in Western society and culture. These views which began in a theological and religious matrix have penetrated into the marrow of Western civilization and continue to influence the Western world's attitudes toward the Jews to this very moment.

When you go home to your studies, if you will open up a dictionary, any unabridged dictionary, and look up the definition of a Jew, you will find the following:

Webster's Universal Dictionary:^{2/}

"Jew - to cheat in trade; as to Jew one out of a horse.
To practice cheating in trade; as, he is said to
Jew. To Jew down."

Funk and Wagnalls:

"Jew - (slang) to get the better of in a bargain; over-
reach: referring to the proverbial keenness
of Jewish traders."

Merriam Webster:

"Jew - adjective, Jewish, usually taken to be offensive.

"Jew - verb, to cheat by sharp business practise, usually
taken to be offensive.

"Jew - noun, a person believed to drive a hard bargain."

Contrast this with the dictionary's definition of "Christian":

Webster's Universal Dictionary:

"Christian - colloquial, a decent, civilized, or present-
able person, characteristic of Christian people, kindly."

If one looks at the general social reality in terms of the way the Jew is perceived by and large - with significant changes in recent years growing out of our greater contact with each other - one finds, for example, a striking double standard in the evaluation of the behavior of the Christian and the Jew in the world of commerce. When a Jewish business man is successful in a given business or industry, in the parlor rooms and in the bars where the "man-to-man talk" is made, (and all of us have heard this enough to know that it is true and not a figment of one's imagination) one hears the "explanation" - "Well, he's a Jew." There's something sharp, there's something cunning about his practices. It is the Jewishness of the man which leads to his success. But if a Christian or a gentile, who may not be observant or pious, is engaged in the same industry, using virtually the same business practices, achieves the same kind of success, then in the American mythos this is the result of "Yankee ingenuity." This is living out the Horatio Alger myth of rags to riches in American life. It is a consequence of living out the "Puritan ethic."

One must confront ultimately how it was possible, within our own lifetime, as recently as the past twenty-five years, that in a country - which when it vaunted its great values and its great moral traditions, spoke of itself as a country of ancient Christian culture, which was in fact the seat of the Holy Roman Empire for almost a millenium beginning with Charlemagne - that it was possible for millions of Christians to sit by as spectators while millions of human beings, who were their brothers and sisters, the sons of Abraham according to the flesh, were carted out to their death in the most brutal, inhuman, uncivilized ways. And one must confront as one of the terrible facts of the history of this period the conversation that took place between Adolph Hitler and two bishops in April, 1933, when they began raising questions about the German policy toward the Jews and Hitler said to them, as reported in the book, Hitler's Table-Talk, that he was simply completing what Christian teaching and preaching has been saying about the Jews for the better part of 1,900 years. "You should turn away from them as a pest and a plague of the human race," said St. John Chrysostom, and 1,500 years later thousands of his disciples implemented his teachings, literally.

One must compel oneself to face these hard facts in our own time because there is a tendency to want to evade the reality of this problem, since in America both for Christians and Jews anti-Semitism is a social nuisance. It is not a serious problem of human deprivation, of human discomfort. But to this very day in the City of Buenos Aires, for example, where 400,000 Jews live, Jewish merchants are packing guns into their business places, Synagogues are being stored with armaments because in the past three or four years the neo-fascists, ultra-nationalist movement called the TACUARA, consisting entirely of young Catholic well-to-do students, have been raging through the streets of Buenos Aires spraying machinegun fire at Synagogues and throwing bombs into

Jewish businesses. Last year in June, 1963, the TACUARA apprehended a Jewish girl, Graciela Sirota, as she came home from the university in the evening, kidnaped her and carved a swastika in her breast. The chaplain of this TACUARA movement, a Father Julio Meinville, has written a book called The Mystery of the Jew in History. Father Meinville based his "ministry" to these students in the TACUARA movement on the fact that the tradition of St. John Chrysostom's views toward the Jews and Judaism and those who have repeated that tradition, represent the authentic view of the Church toward the Jewish people and to Judaism.

Within the past four to five years all of us have lived through what in fact may be the most revolutionary period in the history of the Christian-Jewish encounter over the past two millennia. As in race relations, the Churches have begun to seek to reconcile the ambivalences and the contradictions between theology and history. The Vatican, through the Ecumenical Council's initial approval of a declaration dealing with Catholic-Jewish relation, the World Council of Churches, which has adopted a very forthright resolution at New Delhi in December, 1961, and which has been carrying out a significant program of confronting this evil, this scandal of anti-Semitism which hangs like an albatross on the conscience of the churches, and American Catholic and Protestant bodies have all contributed dramatically to the powerful assault against anti-Semitism. Their wide-ranging programs of textbook and curriculum revision, teacher training, seminary education, retreats, adult education, have been confronting increasingly the issues of responsible portrayal of Jews and Judaism.

I have talked at great length but I want to take just two minutes to tell you something about what I experienced in Rome these past few weeks. If nothing else comes out of the Ecumenical Council other than what took place this past Monday and Tuesday (Sept. 28 and 29), in Rome, the Council has more than justified its existence in terms of Jewish interests. On Friday, preceding last Monday, the 28th, Cardinal Bea arose in the aula of St. Peter's Basilica to read his relatio (introduction) to the "Jewish Declaration." After indicating the importance of this decree to the life of the Church, the importance of the Church's understanding its true relationship to Israel, to the Bible, to the Jewish people, ancient and present, - that understanding upon which is founded the whole future and prospect of the Biblical, liturgical and theological renewals of the Church - Cardinal Bea declared before 2,300 Council Fathers, "There are many historical instances from various nations which cannot be denied. In these instances this belief concerning the culpability of the Jewish people as such has led Christians to consider and to call the Jews with whom they live the deicide people, reprobated and cursed by God and therefore to look down upon them and indeed to persecute them." Then he described what he thought was authentic Church teaching about the role of the Jews in the Passion and the mystery of the relationship between Christians and Jews. The moment of

truth, as many of us saw in Rome, occurred on those two days when 35 cardinals and bishops of the Church from 22 countries arose on the floor of St. Peter's, and one after another, in terms more powerful and more committed than had ever been heard before called upon the Catholic Church to condemn anti-Semitism as a sin against the conscience of the church. The Church must reconcile her teachings of love and charity and fraternity with the practices of her faithful, which have far too long been marked by contempt and animosity for the Jew. While it is recognized that anti-Semitism arises out of multiple phenomena, political, social, economic, Christians cannot allow Christianity to be exploited by anti-Semites and bigots to advance this teaching, which is an anathema to the Church. And one after another the Council Fathers called for the Church to reject the ancient and false charge of "deicide" against the Jews. Archbishop Heenan of England (now Cardinal Heenan) rose up and said, "The term deicide must be torn out of the vocabulary of Christendom. The term is absurd and an insult to the human intelligence. As if man can kill God." Others addressed themselves to the theological problem - if Jesus foreordained his death, as declared in the fourth catechism of the Council of Trent, "by internal assent rather than by external violence," how can the Church charge the Jews with collective guilt in ancient times or in present times? One after another, 31 out of 35 Council Fathers declared their support of a strong declaration that would repudiate the terrible "Christ-killer" charge and all manifestations of anti-Semitism.

At the end of the second day I went to the Bishop's Briefing Panel held on the Via della Conciliazione. An official of the American hierarchy came over to me with tears in his eyes and said, "Marc, this was the greatest moment in the history of this Ecumenical Council and I dare say in the history of all Ecumenical Councils for on no other issue had so many cardinals of such great prominence spoken out. On no other issue, including religious liberty, has there been such unanimity of feeling as on this question. The only opposition was pro-forma opposition." Even Cardinal Ruffini said he accepted in principle the need for the Church to condemn anti-Semitism, although he went on to say some other things which were not as acceptable to many around the Council. Even the Patriarchs from Arab lands said the Church must condemn anti-Semitism, although they made an issue of possible political implications. But for those of us who stood in Rome on those two days, it represented the turning of a cycle of history. A cycle of history that was for far too long malignant has begun to turn, and may yet become benign, may yet allow Christians and Jews to approach each other, not through the myths, the superstitions and the hostilities of a polemical past but as human beings, sons of Abraham, to share a common patrimony in their love of God and therefore, their love for one another. Thank you.

^{1/} The Teaching of Contempt (Holt, Winston, and Rinehart).

^{2/} See articles, "Jews and Judaism in the Dictionary," by Jacob Chenitz, Reconstructionist Magazine, June, 1963.