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Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 5, Folder 36, "The Vatican Council Decree and the Jews",
Undated.



THE VATICAN COUNCIL DECREE AND THE JEWS

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

When Pope Paul VI was still Archbishop of Milan, the president of the Milan Jewish community drew his attention to anti-Semitic references in a book being presented to boys and girls on the occasion of their Confirmation. Cardinal Montini promptly ordered the withdrawal of the imprimatur and of the book itself.

When Pope Paul VI received a delegation of Jewish leaders last month in the throne room of the Vatican, he declared, "We have a common Bible and common God, a common affinity for the Old ~~Testament~~ Testament as a source of Divine revelation which I use every day in thought and prayer. Therefore, we pray ~~together~~ together so that ^{the} Almighty guide, comfort, and bless us... These bonds are what we would like to strengthen."

These two incidents illustrate vividly the religious ^{human relations} and ~~social~~ implications contained in the decree regarding the Jews that Cardinal Bea introduced to the Vatican Council this past Friday morning. Should the Council Fathers adopt this decree - as millions of Jews ~~and non-Jews~~ throughout the world devoutly hope and pray they will - Pope Paul VI's example, both in deed and in word, might be seen as providing decisive guidance to the world's 550 million Catholics as to how the substance of the decree is to be translated into daily practice.

The implementation of the decree, quite obviously, rests entirely in the hands of the Church and can ~~best~~ be understood as part of the Church's vast and impressive effort of renewal and

2daily practice

The decree, which condemns it as "unjust and injurious to call the Jewish people a deicide one," and which declares as "anathema" anti-Jewish attitudes and practices, represents the capstone effort of Catholic authorities to repudiate ~~the~~ ^{an ancient} charge ~~of~~ ~~which~~ which has resulted in untold suffering and martyrdom for the Jewish people. Catholic scholars and writers in the United States, Europe, and Latin America have long emphasized that the Jews are not to be made a scapegoat for the sins of all mankind.

Unfortunately, despite such statements, the charge of Jewish responsibility for the death of Jesus and their consequent rejection and punishment by God, is still found in Catholic textbooks, sermons, and liturgical commentaries. The importance of Cardinal Bea's decree, if it is approved, is that it will give the highest level of support and encouragement to the efforts of Catholic scholars, theologians, clergymen, teachers, religious journalists, professional and lay officials of international and national Catholic bodies to make this humane and enlightened viewpoint permeate the entire Church, from the Vatican to the parochial school classroom. It cannot but help ^{as well to} influence beneficently ~~as well~~ ^{multiple} other/sources that lead to ^{Contribute} anti-Semitism, which involve the complex interaction of the home, school, peer group, neighborhood, and mass media.

The implementation of the decree, quite obviously, rests entirely in the hands of the Church and can be understood as part of the Church's vast and impressive effort of renewal and reform. It is neither fitting nor proper for non-Catholics to comment regarding the procedures which the Church may choose to adopt for implementing the decree. Unquestionably, however, individual Jewish scholars and

competent Jewish organizations devoted to the promotion of interreligious understanding, stand ready to cooperate with Catholic authorities should their cooperation be requested.

The growth of dialogue between Catholics and Jews within recent years must be acknowledged as a remarkable tool for ~~advancing~~ ^{promoting interreligious} understanding between Catholics and Jews, and Christians and Jews in general. Such dialogue has proceeded on every level, from scholarly exchanges between the most eminent theologians of both faith communities - such as Cardinal Bea and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America - to consultations between Catholic and Jewish laymen in local communities, mutually exploring solutions to community problems and seeking cooperation and joint action across religious lines. We believe such dialogues have been enormously beneficial, both for Catholics and Jews who have learned better to understand one another, but also for the common good of the ~~the~~ community as a whole.

Impressive as the growth of these mutual exchanges have been, only a small proportion of Catholics and Jews have been touched by the experience. The walls of misunderstanding, built over many centuries, have not yet given way to permit a completely free flow of ideas between the two communities. Imagine the kind of intellectual and spiritual flowering that might result if the dialogue process were extended to areas of exchange that have not yet been affected by it. Imagine for example the convening of meetings between teaching nuns and Jewish teachers confronting the misperceptions between their communities. Imagine, a volume on the history of relations between Christians and Jews jointly co-authored by outstanding Catholic and Jewish scholars. How many misconceptions, exaggerations, and historical

absurdities might be finally laid to rest!

Those of us who have been privileged to be related to this process of Catholic-Jewish dialogue have been enriched and enlightened by it. We can only hope that the Vatican Council decree on Jews and Judaism, in its essence and through its implementation, will multiply these opportunities for Catholics and Jews everywhere, and will help to translate ~~the~~ into reality the vision of the late Pope John XXIII of blessed memory for "a new order of human relations."

