

# Value Seen in Controversial Vatican Guidelines

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On Oct. 28, 1965 Pope Paul VI promulgated the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, a document formulated by the Bishops who had participated in the Second Vatican Council. This declaration (referred to by its first two Latin words, *Nostra Aetate*) first of all deals briefly with non-Christians in general, and then directs its attention to the Muslims and the Jews. Relations with the latter are discussed in 11 relatively short paragraphs. Their brevity, however, did not keep them from being highly controversial, for this declaration had been the subject of intense behind-the-scenes debate, much of it arising from the political tensions between the State of Israel and the neighboring Arab states.

The final draft of *Nostra Aetate* was not what many hoped it would be, but it was a good beginning, and it led to the establishment by Pope Paul of the Secretariat for Non-Christians, and, most recently, of a commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (22 October, 1974).

The recent Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "*Nostra Aetate*" were issued by this last-named commission on Dec. 1, 1974, and immediately provoked a flurry of mixed reactions. It is imperative to read the actual text of these guidelines for there is much that is valuable in them, and which can not be commented on here. My purpose is to single out certain points which I consider to be of particular significance to Catholics who are interested in the dialogue with Jews. I shall do this by commenting briefly on certain key issues discussed in the guidelines, and I shall add a few personal observations at the end.

## Some Key Issues Discussed in the Guidelines

The guidelines "condemn" all forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination. This language is somewhat stronger than that used in *Nostra Aetate*, which "decries" and "reproves" these evils (although earlier versions of *Nostra Aetate* are said to have been more strongly worded).

***'This document is admittedly only a beginning, but it opens up some exciting new paths to follow.'***

The guidelines clearly enunciate the need for dialogue with Judaism, and indicate that this cannot be a mere monologue, but must be based on respect for the other "as he is." Catholics must recognize that Judaism did not end with the destruction of the Temple, but went on to develop a religious tradition rich in value. This acknowledgment of the reality and vitality of post-biblical Judaism is a marked advance over *Nostra Aetate*, even though it is still framed in cautious and rather evasive terms.

The guidelines enunciate in a way that *Nostra Aetate* did not the difficulties that Jews experience when faced with Christianity. These difficulties are limited to two (the first theological, the second historical and psychological):

\*Jewish devotion to the Divine transcendence makes the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God incomprehensible and repugnant;

\*An "unfortunate past" has given rise to "widespread suspicion" concerning the honesty of motivation in the partners to the dialogue.

It is good to see this attempt to state more clearly and openly the obstacles to dialogue, but it would have been helpful to describe in somewhat greater detail the theological difficulties, and it would have been truly refreshing had the Guidelines been less bland and non-committal in describing the historical obstacle. Nineteen centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, culminating in the holocaust of the 1930's and 1940's is not very convincingly described by an allusion to an "unfortunate past."

The guidelines call for "common meeting in the presence of God, in prayer and silent

meditation," something *Nostra Aetate* did not mention. This suggestion was interpreted by some as recommending joint liturgical services, something many Jews could not accept. The text of the guidelines is nuanced here and clearly means to suggest that Catholics and Jews should undertake prayer in common only in circumstances considered appropriate by the members of both traditions.

The guidelines indicate that special care must be taken in homilies, in the classroom, and in Bible translations, to see to it that anti-Semitism and prejudice is not fostered by the way in which Christian truth is presented. *Nostra Aetate* dealt with this problem in a less specific and practical way. The translation of the liturgical formularies into English, and the new catechetical methods have made everyone more conscious of this problem. It is not clear in the guidelines what steps may be taken with regard to the texts of the New Testament which have often led to such regrettable attitudes. This will undoubtedly come with time.

Of particular significance to me was the Guidelines' reference to the fact that "Judaism in the time of Christ and the Apostles was a complex reality, embracing many different trends, many spiritual, religious, social and cultural values." It would have been helpful if this point could have been developed at greater length. At issue is the fact that the New Testament is written from a polemical point of view as far as Judaism is concerned, and that it tends to flatten out the rich variety and complexity of Jewish life during the time of Jesus and of the early Church. The Jews are presented for the most part in an unflattering light, as "them," while "we" are presented more sympathetically. The careful modern reader of the New Testament is more aware of the richness and vitality of Judaism in the first century than were Christian readers of previous generations, and we have, for that

reason, an immense responsibility to do justice to historical truth in presenting the world in which Jesus and His first followers lived.

Also significant is the insistence that the Old Testament must not be thought of as a "religion of only justice, fear, and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbor." This incredibly tenacious perversion of the Old Testament message is heard even today from people who should know better, but who instinctively fall back on threadbare clichés and stereotypes when describing the supposed discontinuity between the Old Testament's "God of Justice" and the New Testament's "God of Love."

It might have been helpful if the guidelines had pointed out the unfairness of extolling Christianity over Judaism by emphasizing the beauty and transcendence of the Christian theory over against the poverty of Jewish practice.

The guidelines take a very interesting step when they recommend that "Higher Institutions of Catholic Research, in association if possible with other similar Christian institutions" may want to establish "chairs of Jewish Studies" and to collaborate with Jewish scholars.

The "Conclusion" of the Guidelines makes a provocative point when it states that since Judaism is so inextricably bound up with Christianity, it is imperative for Christians to understand the Mystery of Israel if they are to understand in any sense the Mystery of Christ and of the Church. Thus a knowledge of Judaism is not simply an ecumenical imperative, but is a constitutive part of Christian teaching, preaching, and self-understanding.

## Some Personal Observations

It is unfortunate that these guidelines were drawn up without

any consultation with Jewish scholars and leaders. If such dialogue had been conducted before the final version of the Guidelines, it might have been possible to eliminate some of the infelicities and insensitivities in the text, and to clarify some of the passages which Jewish readers would be most inclined to misunderstand.

While the guidelines are intended to be pastoral and practical in their content, they do touch upon a number of theological issues. Some of these might have been dealt with more clearly and at greater length, since in their present highly abbreviated form they barely hint at certain problems and suggestions, without providing much in the way of the specific direction to be followed.

In the light of the "unfortunate past" and the strong feelings which contemporary Jews have about the continuing existence of the State of Israel, it is unfortunate that the guidelines did not in some way attempt to impress on Catholics the essential link between the Jewish People and the Land of Israel. It is literally impossible to understand the Old Testament, or the post-biblical Jewish theological and devotional writings, or to enter into a meaningful dialogue with contemporary Judaism, without an awareness of this inner bond. It is true that the State of Israel is a political reality, and indeed a controversial one, but it is not for that reason any less a religious reality, and the failure to deal with its implications in these Guidelines seriously weakens their effectiveness, and even their credibility, at least as far as Jews are concerned.

Jewish people in general feel that the Church has hedged consistently about the State of Israel, and that our official Church policy and Church agencies have in fact favored the Arab cause. Whether this is true or not can be debated, but the publication of these guidelines at this particular time of crisis for the Jewish People seems to suggest that Catholics are being invited now, more than ever, to enter into a loving dialogue with their Jewish brothers and sisters. This document is admittedly only a beginning, but it opens up some exciting new paths to follow. It will be up to us whether we ignore this invitation, or accept it enthusiastically.

# Auburn Parish Works To Alleviate World Hunger

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

"Everyone should be concerned with world hunger, in this country and abroad as Christ tells us to feed the hungry," said Mrs. Kathy Fox, chairperson of the Human Development Committee of St. Alphonsus, recent sponsor of a sharing supper attended by more than 200 parishioners.

"The purpose of the sharing supper was two-fold, as a way to help the hungry and to increase our awareness of the problem in the world. The money collected will either go to a direct assistance program or will be contributed to an agency with long range goals such as Bread for the World," she said.

"The sharing supper is one event in an overall plan to raise parishioner consciousness of some of the social problems within and beyond the parish boundaries, explained Father Robert Rice, associate pastor. It also serves to identify such problems as specific concerns for Christian action in light of the gospel of Jesus as a social gospel.

In December, food, money and

gifts were collected for local distribution. Other projects will include a meatless cookbook, a program on how to raise gardens and canning methods. Each undertaking is practical in nature and provides an opportunity for parishioners to come together in a spirit and sign of Christian unity of purpose.

Father Rice expressed pleasure at the number attending the supper. He feels there are people willing to become more involved in parish centered activity, so a variety of avenues need to be opened such as participation in the liturgy, or for others, it might be planning a parish event or the social action aspect of concern.

The problem of world hunger, he pointed out, was the common concern, and the liturgy was formed around the community supper. It is the liturgy that is the crux for building community response and the increasing aim for participation by larger segment of the parish, he said.

"The beautiful part of the Human Development Committee work is that it is coming from the people and not from the initiation by parish staff. It is a true call of the community and

building of communal spirit of the Christian way of life," he said.

## Alcoholism Topic

**Coming** — The Corning Area Council on Alcoholism will hold its annual dinner on Thursday, April 24, at the Lodge on the Green in Painted Post. Guest speaker will be David N. Bates of Baltimore County, Maryland, where he is a member of the Board of Higher Education Loan Corporation, having been appointed to that position by the governor.

In 1969, Bates developed interest in the field of alcoholism and since that time has served as a member of the board of directors and guest lecturer at Hiddenbrook, a private alcoholism center in Harford County, Maryland, and at Mountain Manor, a private rehabilitation center for alcoholics in Frederick County, Maryland. He is the co-founder, member of the board of directors and attorney for the Pilot House in Baltimore County, Maryland, an institution funded by the Maryland Division of Alcoholic Control.



Waiting for Food

The World Conference in Rome dealt with words. This African child deals with hunger. The Food Conference was concerned with how much and from whom food should come to feed the world's hungry. This child is concerned with when he will eat his next meal. A tin can which once held emergency rations is empty and he waits for another. (RNS)