

# Conflict with Jews requires papal action

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

There is racism in the Catholic Church. No one can deny that.

There are Catholics who are racist in their attitudes and their behavior toward people of color — especially blacks. And there are Catholics who are racist in their attitudes and their behavior toward Jews. But the two cases are not the same.

No one could cite anything in the official teachings of the Catholic Church or in the words and deeds of high-ranking church officials that could be taken — even implicitly — as support for racism against people of color.

On the contrary, the Catholic Church has been unequivocal in its denunciation of the sin of racism: in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in such post-conciliar Vatican statements as "The Church and Racism" (1988), in various papal speeches — including the one given by Pope John Paul II in 1987 at the predominantly black Xavier University in New Orleans — and in several pronouncements of national episcopal conferences. Church leaders are embarrassed, appalled, ashamed and outraged whenever confronted by the ugly face of racism within the Catholic community.

Blacks could not reasonably charge that racist attitudes are fed by official church teachings or by the deliberate behavior of church officials. But anti-Semitism is different.

Jews know that official Catholic teaching has regarded them as unfaithful adherents of a repealed covenant.

They know that in spite of the Second Vatican Council's effort to heal the breach between Christian and Jew, the language

regarding the ancient covenant remains careful and guarded.

Although "the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues" (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, n. 4), the covenant with the Jews was only "by way of preparation and as a figure of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ ..." (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 9).

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, a prominent U.S. Jewish leader, has recently suggested that Jewish-Catholic relations during the papacy of John Paul II have taken "two steps forward, one step backward." Among the steps forward were the pope's remarkably moving visit to Rome's main synagogue in 1986 and his dialogue with a delegation of American Jewish leaders in 1987, just prior to his second pastoral visit to the United States.

But in 1982 Pope John Paul II granted an audience to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, and then in 1987 came the even more controversial meeting with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, who was accused of involvement in Nazi war crimes.

Jews also have been troubled in recent weeks by the pope's comments at his weekly general audiences on Aug. 2 and 9.

He said that the Old Testament showed many instances of Jewish "infidelity to God" and that the prophets were sent to call the Jewish people to conversion; to warn them of the hardness of their hearts; and to foretell a new covenant still to come.

This was in contrast to the pope's remarks to prominent Jews in Mainz, West

Germany, in 1980, when he referred to the Jewish people as "the people of God, of the Old Covenant never revoked by God." In his general audience of Aug. 16 the pope seemed to tone down the language of the previous two audiences.

Citing Deuteronomy and other biblical passages, Pope John Paul II referred to the Jews as God's "chosen people," declaring that Israel is tied by love to God "in a particular and exceptional way." It is in this larger context that one must read the ongoing dispute over the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz.

The church's official teaching about the two covenants, the papal audiences for Arafat and Waldheim, the repudiation of the agreement to move the Carmelite convent away from the Auschwitz site, the polemical language employed by the Polish primate Cardinal Josef Glemp — all these conspire to leave many Jews uneasy, to say

## The sin of their father brings suffering to David's children

By Cindy Bassett  
Courier columnist

"David, please let me bring you something to eat," Eli called softly from the doorway to the king's chamber. There was no reply from the man lying face down on the floor. Eli waited for a time, and just before he turned to leave, added, "It will not help the child if you become ill now, too."

David had refused to eat since the day the baby born to Bathsheba had suddenly become sick. A week later, the boy died.

In his sorrow, David recalled the words of Nathan, the prophet: "Because you are sorry for the evil you have done, God, in his great mercy, will forgive you. However, your own family will bring you trouble. The sword will never depart from your house."

Later on, Bathsheba and David had another son. They called him "Solomon." Nathan told them to nickname the boy "Jedidiah," which means "beloved of the Lord." And David was comforted in his great sorrow.

David had 17 sons, and a great rivalry developed between the half-brothers. Each one of them thought they deserved to be king of Israel someday.

When David's firstborn son, Amnon, mistreated his half-sister, Tamar, David did not punish him. Tamar's brother, Absalom, was determined to have revenge on Amnon. Two years later, the sword would fall again in David's house.

"Father, it is sheep shearing time," Absalom said to David one day. "I want the whole family to take part in the festivities. You come, too, with all of your court officials."

"No, son, it would be too much work if we all went," David replied.

"Will you at least allow for all of my brothers to come to a banquet?" Absalom asked.



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

the least.

Fortunately, other church officials have been forthright in their reaffirmation and support of the original covenant agreement: three of the original signers (the cardinal-archbishops of Brussels, Paris, and Lyons) and at least three prominent U.S. archbishops (New York's Cardinal O'Connor, Boston's Cardinal Law, and Los Angeles' Archbishop Mahony).

At this writing, Pope John Paul II has not yet intervened, but that now seems inevitable, whether openly or behind the scenes.

This is no longer a local dispute. And the Vatican has not hesitated to intervene in other cases where intervention was far less justifiable than in this one.



## THE BIBLE CORNER

"Yes, of course," David agreed, not suspecting Absalom's real intentions.

That evening, at the banquet, Absalom told his servants, "Do not allow Amnon's wineglass to empty. Keep filling it up until he becomes drunk. Then watch for my signal. I want you to kill him."

Amnon was murdered in front of all of the guests. Everyone fled, including Absalom, who went to Geshur and remained there in exile for three years.

King David was given a double portion of sorrow. Amnon, his eldest son, was dead and the king mourned that loss for a long time. Absalom, the king's favorite son, was as good as dead to his father.

Joab, David's chief army commander, knew how much David missed Absalom. So he arranged for Absalom to return to Jerusalem. Even so, David refused to see him. Two more years passed before David finally agreed to meet with Absalom.

Everyone in Jerusalem celebrated the reconciliation between father and son. Prince Absalom was a handsome, charismatic person and he had grown very popular with the people.

The peace in David's household would be brief. Another sword was about to fall. This time both house and kingdom would be divided.

Scripture reference: 2 Samuel 12:16-2 Samuel 14.

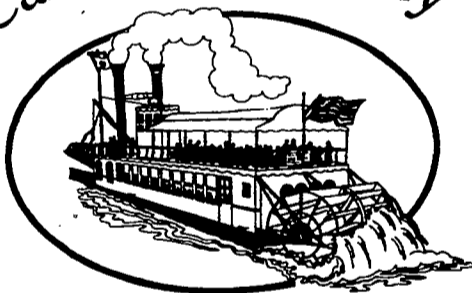
Meditation: God forgave David's sins. But he still had to pay for the consequences of his evil actions.

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Other drop-off locations include: Waterloo: St. Mary's Rectory (539-2944); Seneca Falls: Leroux's (568-6922); Stanley: Bodine's, (526-5980); Newark: Mascioli's (597-2481); Marion: Braselton's (926-5008); Phelps: Sears (548-9420); Macedon: Marvin's (986-4570); Palmyra: Reilly's (946-4570); Clifton Springs: Leroy's (462-3850); Shortsville: Cooke's (289-9300); Canandaigua: Goodnow's (394-0783); Lyons: Mamusica's (946-5089); Penn Yan: St. Michael's Convent (536-3794).

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