

Why did the Vatican wait so long?

By Father Richard P. McBrien
Syndicated columnist

All Catholics should welcome the recently signed agreement between the Vatican and Israel to establish formal diplomatic relations. Many, however, are probably indifferent to the whole affair. That would be a grievous mistake, and this week's column is an effort to explain why.

We Catholics are a people awash in symbols. The principle of sacramentality is central to our theological, liturgical and spiritual traditions.

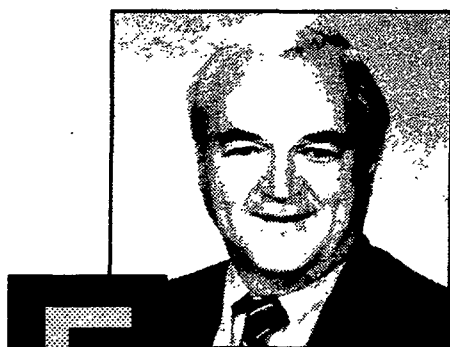
When St. Ignatius Loyola enjoined his young company of Jesuits to see God in all things, he was echoing that same principle. Jesus Christ, the seven sacraments, countless sacramentals, and indeed the whole created universe are, for Catholics, signs of God's loving presence and instruments of God's redemptive work on our behalf.

Among the sacramentals that Catholics employ as ways of raising their minds and hearts to God are holy water, palms, ashes, statues, and medals.

No sacramental is a more common fixture in Catholic homes and schools than the crucifix, which is, for Catholics, a reminder of God's unbounded, sacrificial love for humanity.

But symbols have different meanings for different people. By contrast, when many Jews look upon the cross, they see in it a symbol of repression and persecution.

It is a reminder to them of how, in times long past, Catholics forcibly "converted" Jews to Christianity, or



ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

expelled "converted" Jews to Christianity, or expelled them from their homes.

And it is a particularly gruesome reminder of how, in times not so long past, a bent version of the cross, called a swastika, became every king's emblem of mass murder and barbarities.

Feeding this was a theologically corrupt, centuries-old belief that the Jewish people — not only in Jesus' time but for all time — bears a collective guilt for the crucifixion.

It should not be completely surprising, therefore, that many Jews have been less than enthusiastic about the new Vatican-Israeli accords.

As the deputy foreign minister who signed the accords on behalf of Israel pointed out: "Behind the agreement there are thousands of years of history, full of hatred, fear and ignorance, with a few islands of understanding, of

cooperation and of dialogue. Behind the agreement there are very few years of light and many more years of darkness."

The deputy foreign minister's counterpart at the ceremony, the Vatican undersecretary of state, did not say anything "that could be remotely construed as contrition, as some Israelis had demanded," *The New York Times* reported. He spoke instead of a new impetus and energy toward "dialogue and respectful cooperation between Catholics and Jews."

To this day, however, many Jews remain convinced, even in the teeth of persistent Vatican denials, that the wartime pontiff, Pius XII, "did not speak out with enough force or raise his hand with enough vigor" to save some of the six million Jews executed by the Nazis.

To be sure, the Second Vatican Council did much to alleviate this Jewish pain and anger. The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) made clear that "what happened in (Christ's) passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today" (n.4).

The council insisted, furthermore, that Jews were not to be presented as "repudiated or cursed by God," and it deplored "the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source."

In April 1986 Pope John Paul II became the first pope to visit a synagogue — the main one in Rome — where he called Jews "our beloved el-

der brothers" and condemned anti-Semitism in words taken directly from *Nostra Aetate*.

For many Jews, however, these positive developments — including the new diplomatic initiative — are too little, too late.

A respected daily newspaper in Jerusalem editorialized that, in view of the church's long persecution of Jews, it "should not be forgiven." A commentary in the largest selling paper in Israel referred to "the souls of millions of tortured who went to Heaven in black smoke, under the blessing of the Holy See."

At the same time many other voices in the Jewish community, here and abroad, have applauded the diplomatic initiative, referring to it as "the end of a long chapter characterized by estrangement and a painful tormented relationship."

But the state of Israel has been in existence for almost 50 years. Why did the Vatican wait so long?

One reason is that it feared reprisals against the tiny minority of Arab Christians living throughout the Middle East. The recent Arab-Israeli accords changed that situation.

Another reason may be the Vatican's distress over the recent revival of anti-Semitism throughout Eastern Europe.

Every Catholic should be especially concerned about that ugly phenomenon — and mightily ashamed as well that so many of their co-religionists continue to wallow in the muck and mire of anti-Semitism.

It is against everything that Jesus, himself a Jew, stood for — and died for.

Struggle has a spirituality all its own

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce
Syndicated columnist

Ed Shurna has spent the last 25 years working as a community organizer in some of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods. Recently, a foundation rewarded him with a six-month, paid sabbatical.

What did he do with it? Travel to the Holy Land? Vacation in the Caribbean? Spend a semester studying at Harvard?

Not Shurna. He journeyed to South Africa and Central America to interview people who have been involved in the fights for freedom and justice — and more specifically about the spirituality they found in their struggle.

"This idea came to me when we were fighting the building of a new football stadium for the Bears on the west side of Chicago," he explains. "The stadium would have wiped out the entire community, and there were



FAITH AND WORK

no plans for replacement housing or jobs for the residents.

"At a certain point, it looked as if we had definitely lost the fight, and I

was sitting around after a meeting feeling pretty sorry for myself when this little 78-year-old African-American lady, Mabel Manning, came up to me and asked me what was wrong," he added. "When I told her that I was discouraged, she asked, 'Do you know what the word 'struggle' means? It doesn't mean you are never down or always victorious. It means you never give up hope.'

"I was amazed that this woman could have so much hope in the midst of our defeat, and I realized that she had a spirituality that I didn't understand," Shurna continued. "It turned out later that we in fact won the fight on the stadium. When I got the opportunity for this sabbatical, I decided that I had to find out how people like Mabel in other countries dealt with struggle."

Shurna went to South Africa, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama. "I always started by

telling people the story of Mabel Manning and the stadium," he explains, "and they connected with it immediately. They were both intrigued and grateful that a North American would come — not only to ask them about their struggle but about what is helping them sustain it.

"Although every person I talked to had risked his or her life, and many had had one or more loved ones killed, they all expressed a deep spirituality that amazed me," Shurna says. "Not all of them put it in religious terms, but they definitely believed that there was a power greater than them that supported them and gave meaning to their lives. Every single one of them — just like Mabel — believed that ultimately their cause would win because it was right and just."

Shurna has returned to the U.S. determined to continue his investigation of struggle's spirituality and to share what he has learned with others.

Tour Guides Needed

to escort motorcoach tours on an as-needed basis

- Do you enjoy travel?
- Do you like working with a group?

Alexander Tour & Travel, a division of Empire Trailways, is looking for individuals who work well with the public to act as a tour guide on both one-day & overnight motorcoach tours. Experience in the travel/tourism field preferred.

*Enrollment does not guarantee employment. Applicants will be screened to fill available positions.

CALL BETWEEN 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15TH
(716) 232-4717



Imported Specialties • Seafood and Smoked Fish

PITTSFORD FISH MARKET

Pittsford Colony Plaza - 3400 Monroe Avenue



SPECIALTY
SAUSAGES
&
EUROPEAN
STYLE
COLD CUTS

**FOR ALL YOUR
SEAFOOD
NEEDS DURING
LENT**

DAILY
SPECIALS
ON OUR
FRESH &
SMOKED
FISH

Hot Fish to Go
Nick Vasalos

OPEN 7 DAYS • 381-8190

Fresh Fish • Live Lobster
Frozen Seafood