

COLUMNISTS

Catholic-Jewish relations inch ahead

The Vatican recently concluded a symposium on "The Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu." Pope John Paul II addressed the participants on Oct. 31. No Jews were present, according to the Vatican, because the discussion was about intra-church matters, a not completely persuasive explanation. The pope's talk reaffirmed the Catholic Church's firm stance against all forms of anti-Semitism. It "has no justification and is absolutely reprehensible," he declared.

More specifically, he condemned "erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability" for the death of Christ. Such views "have circulated for too long, engendering feelings of hostility towards this people."

By the time the wave of persecutions inspired by a "pagan anti-Semitism" swept across Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, consciences had been "lulled" and "the spiritual resistance of many was not what humanity rightfully expected from the disciples of Christ."

A bit of defensiveness seems to have crept into the pope's address at this point. While acknowledging that anti-Semitism was manifested "in the Christian world," he would not concede any culpability on the part of "the Church as such." He also reminded his audience that many Christians "did everything to save the persecuted even at the risk of their lives."



By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

The latter point was clearly valid, although in the context it could appear to be self-serving. The former point, however, is beyond understanding. If Catholics, including bishops (and, in the eyes of many, even the Bishop of Rome, Pius XII), kept silent during the Holocaust or, in some few cases in France, actively collaborated with the Nazis, how can it be said that "the Church as such" had nothing to do with the spread of the most virulent forms of anti-Semitic thinking and behavior? And why else did "the Church as such" after Vatican II have to rid its liturgical and catechetical texts of their residual anti-Semitic elements?

Indeed, the pope's address did not go so far as the recent statement of the French bishops that acknowledged the culpability of the church's silence in the face of the persecution and deportation of French Jews and asked the Jewish com-

munity for forgiveness.

To be sure, the pope did reaffirm the biblical principle that the Jewish people remain beloved of God, as God's Chosen People (Romans 11:28-29). That status did not somehow expire with the birth of Christ.

God-made an "irrevocable" Covenant with the Jewish people, the pope insisted, and remains faithful to it.

The pope also touched upon the question of the Jewishness of Jesus. There are those, he noted unhappily, who regard Jesus' Jewishness and the Jewish milieu in which he lived to be nothing more than "cultural accidents."

Such a view, he said, not only ignores the meaning of salvation history but challenges "the very truth of the Incarnation."

The extraordinary advances in Catholic Jewish relations since Pope John XXIII and Vatican II and especially during the pontificate of John Paul II cannot easily be exaggerated. If one needs a reminder of how far we have come, one has only to take note of a passage that would have been included in a planned encyclical on anti-Semitism that was never published because of the death of Pius XI in 1939.

Known as "the suppressed encyclical" (a book of that title has recently appeared in Germany), the document warned that contact with Jews could expose souls to

spiritual danger and to spiritual contagion.

"As long as the unbelief of the Jewish people persists," the draft stated, "as long as there is active hostility to the Christian religion, just so long must the church use every effort to see that the effects of this unbelief and hostility are not to redound to the ruin of the faith and morals of her own members."

Notwithstanding its strong condemnation of racism, it was fortunate that this "suppressed" (or "hidden") encyclical never saw the light of day, given passages of that sort.

Even as we rejoice over the happy turn in Catholic-Jewish relations taken in recent decades, we acknowledge with much sadness how often our common history has been marked by ugliness and shame.

There is much work still to be done, not least of which is a statement from the highest authorities of the Catholic Church comparable to that of the French bishops.

It is not enough to admit that many individual Catholics acted in an un-Christian fashion, either overtly or by their silence, during the Holocaust. The church "as such" also bears guilt.

To eradicate such guilt contrition, confession and forgiveness are required.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Christ child offers new beginning

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 3:1-6. (R1) Baruch 5:1-9. (R2) Philippians 1:4-6, 8-11.

During the season of Advent, we are preparing our hearts to celebrate Christ's coming. We are buying our gifts, putting out our brightly colored lights, baking special treats for family and friends. The preparation and anticipation are part of the joy of Christmas. But John the Baptist tells us there are other things we need to do if we are truly going to be ready for his coming.

First of all, John came preaching a gospel of repentance. C.S. Lewis once said: "Christianity has no message for those who do not realize they are sinners." That's you and me. We are sinners; and if we are going to prepare for Christ's coming, we better do something about sin.

Two Lake Worth, Fla., high school boys drew suspensions from school. They were suspended for eating so much garlic that no one could stand to have them around. They started their garlic binge when they read that garlic has properties for cleansing blood and lowering blood pressure. So they started eating garlic for breakfast the next morning, each consumed three or four heads of garlic apiece.

When teachers and students complained about their odor, the boys simply laughed and went on eating garlic.



By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

When confronted by school officials, the boys protested that the smell couldn't be all that bad. After all, they said, "We were blowing in each other's face, and we couldn't sense a garlic smell." That is precisely the same approach many people take toward sin. Go to confession during Advent? Why? I haven't any sins. They desensitize their own consciences by wallowing in the sin until the sin no longer smells bad to them.

John's word is a word of repentance. If there is something shoddy in our lives, something that is degrading — something beneath our dignity as children of God, get rid of it. Go to confession.

People in John's day were so touched by John's call to repentance that they did change their lives and were baptized by him to show their sincerity.

A woman lived next door to a private zoo. She informed the police that she had a skunk in her cellar.

"Open the cellar door," the officer advised, "make a trail of bread crumbs from the cellar to the garden, and wait for the skunk to follow it outside."

Half an hour later the woman called a second time.

"I did what you said," she said. "Now I have two skunks in my cellar."

One confession is not enough. What we need is a change of heart. What we need is to realize that frequent, at least monthly confession, is a must in our lives. Prepare for the Lord's coming by confession, yes! But not just during Advent, but often.

St. Jerome translated the Bible from Greek to Latin. Near the end of his life, St. Jerome was living near Bethlehem translating some of the Bible when he had a dream. In the dream, the Christ child appeared to him. He was so overwhelmed by the appearance of the Christ child that he felt he had to give him something. So he got some money and offered it, saying, "Here! This is yours."

The Christ child said, "I don't want it." St. Jerome brought some more possessions.

The Christ child said, "I don't want them either."

"If there is anything in the world that I can give you, tell me what it is," St. Jerome said. "What do you want? What do you want me to give you?"

He said he dreamed that the Christ child looked at him and said, "Give me your sin. That's what I came for."

That is what Christ came for, and comes for: to take away our sins.

The best preparation for Christmas is to let him do exactly that by the great sacrament of reconciliation. That is the good news of Advent and Christmas. Because of the Christ child each of us can make a new beginning.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, December 8

Genesis 3:9-15, 20; Ephesians 1, 3-6, 11-12; Luke 1:26-38

Tuesday, December 9

Isaiah 40:1-11; Matthew 18:12-14

Wednesday, December 10

Isaiah 40:25-31; Matthew 11:28-30

Thursday, December 11

Isaiah 41:13-20; Matthew 11:11-15

Friday, December 12

Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19, 12:1-6, 10; Luke 1:39-47

Saturday, December 13

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11;

Matthew 17:10-13

Imported Specialties • Seafood and Smoked Fish

PITTSFORD FISH MARKET

510 Monroe Avenue (near Goodman)

FOR ALL YOUR SEAFOOD NEEDS DURING ADVENT

OPEN 7 DAYS • 271-1780

Special Farm raised catfish \$4.49

Hot Fish to Go
Nick Vasslos

DAILY SPECIALS ON OUR FRESH & SMOKED FISH

Fresh Fish
Live Lobster
Frozen Seafood

DiPonzio Funeral Home Inc.

Across from St. Theodore's Church
Dominic A. DiPonzio - Lic. Mgr.
Christopher B. DiPonzio - L. F. D.
Joseph D. DiPonzio - L. F. D.

219 Spencerport Rd. • Rochester
429-6700

HART MONUMENT COMPANY

Since 1856

Monuments, Markers
and Cemetery Lettering

2301 Dewey Avenue
(OPPOSITE HOLY SEPULCHRE CEMETERY)

(716) 865-6746