

COLUMNISTS

Progress in Jewish-Christian relations

The relationship between the church and the Jews reached its moral low-point in the Holocaust. Fortunately, there have been extraordinary theological, doctrinal and pastoral developments that have begun to change that relationship, especially since John XXIII (1958-63) removed reference to the "perfidious Jews" from the Good Friday liturgy — a relatively small step, but one that paved the way for subsequent leaps forward by the Second Vatican Council, various European bishops' conferences, and Pope John Paul II.

This progress was recently acknowledged in "Dabru Emet" (from the Hebrew phrase, "speak the truth to one another," in Zechariah 8:16), a statement on Christians and Christianity prepared by a group of Jewish scholars and endorsed by some 170 rabbis and scholars from all four branches of Judaism in North America.

"Dabru Emet" refers approvingly to official statements by Christian bodies that have declared that "Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself."

Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* (1965) said "the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for God does not repent



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

of the divine gifts that have been made nor of the calls that have been issued."

The council insisted that Jews of subsequent generations cannot be blamed for those who contributed to Jesus' passion and death: "Although the church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God ... " The council explicitly condemned "the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source" (n. 4).

On Jan. 23, 1995, the German Catholic bishops' conference, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, issued a statement condemning the silence of Christians in the face of the Holocaust, saying that some "paved the way for crimes or even became criminals themselves."

"The failure and guilt of that time," they declared, included a church that "looked too fixedly at the threat to their own institutions and who remained silent about the crimes committed against the Jews and Judaism."

The way to test the "practical sincerity of our will of renewal" is through "the confession of this guilt and the willingness to painfully learn from this history of guilt of our country and of our church as well."

French bishops issued an apology on Sep. 30, 1997, the 57th anniversary of the promulgation of the first of more than 160 anti-Semitic laws and decrees passed by the Vichy regime.

Church leaders, they wrote, "failed to realize that the church, called at that moment to play the role of defender within a social body that was falling apart, did ... have considerable power and influence, and that in the face of the silence of other institutions, its voice could have echoed loudly by taking a definitive stand ... "

The church's "anti-Jewish tradition stamped its mark in differing ways on Christian doctrine and teaching, in theology, apologetics, preaching and in the liturgy. It was on such ground that the venomous plant of hatred for the Jews was able to flourish."

The French bishops' statement ended

on a ringing note: "In the face of so great and utter a tragedy, too many of the church's pastors committed an offense, by their silence, against the church itself and its mission ... We confess this sin. We beg God's pardon, and we call upon the Jewish people to hear our words of repentance."

John Paul II himself has an extraordinary record of achievement in Jewish-Christian relations, including his visit to Rome's chief synagogue in 1986, formal diplomatic recognition of Israel in 1994, and his historic visit to Jerusalem this year, where he prayed at the Wall and at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust victims' memorial.

In his talk at the chief synagogue in 1986, John Paul II expressed "abhorrence for the genocide decreed against the Jewish people during the last war" and even implicitly acknowledged that some of his predecessors were also guilty of sins against the Jewish people — as indeed they were.

The common challenge and opportunity of Christians and Jews is to acknowledge the progress that has been made, to build together upon that progress, and to look more to the future than to the past.

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

Jesus' life reveals 'Christ the King'

34th or Last Sunday of the Church Year, Feast of Christ the King (Nov. 26): (R3) John 18:33-37; (R1) Daniel 7:13-14; (R2) Revelation 1:5-8.

When a general returned to Rome after winning a victory, he was greeted by a Roman triumphal march. High political officials would lead the procession, followed by men blowing trumpets. Then would come wagons carrying some of the spoils taken from the conquered territory, and just behind them a number of defeated army officers in chains. Next came priests carrying burning censers to fill the air with a sweet fragrance. Bringing up the rear would be a group of cheering military men. There would be joy for all except the wretched captives on their way to execution.

Some Christians expect a parade like that when Jesus takes his throne. So we might ask, "What kind of a King is Jesus?"

First of all Jesus is the King of all creation. He proved himself King by the life he lived and the principles he taught. There is no higher standard for living than that which he taught. He taught universal love — dynamic love, active love, self-giving love — for all persons, including even one's enemies. The Son of



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

God revealed that God is love. And we are called to build our lives on his words, because we believe that Jesus Christ is not simply another good teacher or prophet. We believe that he is God!

But more, Jesus Christ is God present with us. When we want to know what God is like, we need only look at Jesus.

In 1910 the song "Casey Jones" was released on radio. I am sure some of you can remember the lyrics. "Casey Jones mounted to the cabin, Casey Jones with the throttle in his hands; Casey Jones mounted to the cabin, with a one-way ticket to the Promised Land."

Casey Jones was a railroad engineer with the Illinois Central. His sterling reputation on the railroad was perfectly complemented by his sterling reputation

in the community. On April 30, 1900, on Casey's evening run, he came upon a passenger train that was in his path. There was no way to avoid some kind of collision. By jumping off the train, Casey could have saved his own life, but then he would have left his passengers helpless. Casey pushed the brake man off the train to safety, then threw himself on the brake. The train slowed, but couldn't stop in time. Casey's quick thinking saved the lives of many people on the passenger train, but he himself died. Casey Jones, an authentic hero, had given his life for others.

Jesus was not the first person, nor the last, to lay down his life for others. But Jesus is God. He is God present among us. So Jesus is our only hope of salvation.

An outstanding Biblical scholar of the past century, C.I. Scofield, used to tell of this incident shortly after he became a Christian. Passing a store in St. Louis, he saw a painting of Daniel in the lion's den. Daniel, surrounded by wild beasts, was looking up and answering the king, who was anxious to know if God had protected him from physical harm.

"As I stood there," said Scofield, "great hope flooded my heart. Only a few days had passed since I, a drunken

lawyer, had been converted. I thought to myself, there are lions all about me too, like my old habits and sins. But the one who shut the lions' mouths for Daniel can also shut them for me! God could save me, too, from the wild beasts in my life. That was why he sent his Son into the world."

God sent his Son, not to condemn the world, but to save it (John 3:17).

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

Daily Readings

Monday, November 27
Revelation 14:1-3, 4-5; Luke 21:1-4
Tuesday, November 28
Revelation 14:14-19; Luke 21:5-11
Wednesday, November 29
Revelation 15:1-4; Luke 21:12-19
Thursday, November 30
Romans 10:9-18; Matthew 4:18-22
Friday, December 1
Revelation 20:1-4, 11-21:2;
Luke 21:29-33
Saturday, December 2
Revelation 22:1-7; Luke 21:34-36

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