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Nostra Aetate Awards Ceremony and Lecture, October 20, 1998

Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding

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The Center for
Christian-Jewish Understanding
of Sacred Heart University

Presents:

Nostra Aetate Awards
Ceremony and Lecture

October 20, 1998

Sutton Place Synagogue
New York City

by

Dr. Samuel Pisar

Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger

John Cardinal O'Connor

Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat

NOSTRA AETATE AWARDS CEREMONY AND LECTURE

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THE CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN-JEWISH UNDERSTANDING OF SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY

The Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding is an educational and research division of Sacred Heart University. Established in April, 1992, the CCJU is a direct outgrowth of the Second Vatican Council's teachings which encourage interreligious dialogue and understanding. The Center draws together clergy, laity, scholars, theologians, and educators to focus on current religious thinking within Judaism and Christianity and provides forums for dialogue in order to advance greater knowledge, understanding, and harmony among religions. The growing participation of Muslims in the interreligious dialogue is also welcomed by the CCJU. As members of each religious tradition reevaluate attitudes toward the other, the Center strives to foster the exploration of the major historical, philosophical, and theological issues on the frontier of interreligious dialogue as these are formulated by scholars at the national and international levels.

To achieve its goals the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding develops programs and publications to overcome deep-seated antagonisms, based on centuries of hostility and mutual estrangement, that recent progress has not healed. The Center also promotes independent research and serves as a vehicle for disseminating its findings to appropriate institutions and individuals around the world.

At an April, 1994 audience with Pope John Paul II in Rome, the Pope encouraged the Center to continue its work of building understanding and harmony between Christians and Jews. Now in its sixth year of development, the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding continues to promote its agenda as part of the mission of Sacred Heart University with strong Vatican support. The successful participation in and sponsoring of numerous national and international missions, seminars, colloquia, and conferences in the United States, Germany, India, Israel, and most recently, at Auschwitz, Poland strongly positions the Center as a world leader in the area of interreligious dialogue. The Center publishes conference proceedings, lectures, monographs, and a tri-annual newsletter and maintains a web site (www.ccju.org) filled with a variety of articles pertaining to Christian-Jewish relations. The Center also published *Toward Greater Understanding*, a Festschrift (festival volume of essays) in honor of Cardinal John O'Connor's 75th birthday and 50 years as a priest, and will publish a book from the Auschwitz Conference, "*Religion and Violence, Religion and Peace.*"

NOSTRA AETATE AWARDS CEREMONY AND LECTURE

On October 20, 1998, the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding honored His Eminence Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger and Chief Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat with the prestigious Nostra Aetate Award. Presenting the awards were Dr. Samuel Pisar and His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor. The event took place at the Sutton Place Synagogue, New York City and was emceed by Mitchell Krauss, former CBS news correspondent. As part of the CCJU Awards Ceremony, Cardinal Lustiger and Chief Rabbi Sirat each delivered a paper, both of which, in addition to Dr. Pisar's and Cardinal O'Connor's comments, are published here. Anthony J. Cernera, Ph.D., president of Sacred Heart University, Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, executive director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, and Rabbi Allan Schranz of the Sutton Place Synagogue also offered brief remarks not included here.

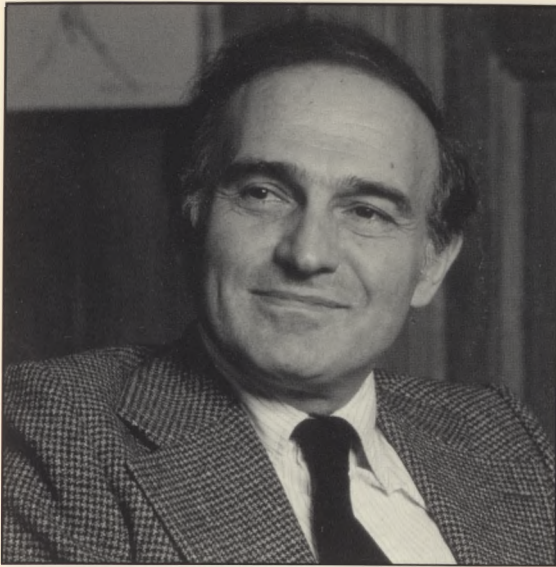
Named after the 1965 Vatican II document that opened the doors of dialogue and mutual respect between Christians and Jews, the *Nostra Aetate* Award is given to those outstanding individuals who are known and respected for their commitment to interreligious dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation. Past recipients have been Cardinal John O'Connor, Sen. Joseph Lieberman, Cardinal William Keeler, Bishop Krister Stendahl, and Rabbi Mordecai Waxman.



Rabbi Sirat, Rabbi Ehrenkranz and Cardinal Lustiger confer after the *Nostra Aetate* Awards ceremony.

"I am convinced, and I am happy to state it on this occasion, that the relationships between Jews and Christians have radically improved in these years. Where there was ignorance and therefore prejudice and stereotypes, there is now growing mutual knowledge, appreciation, and respect. There is, above all, love between us; that kind of love, I mean, which is for both of us a fundamental injunction of our religious traditions, and which the New Testament has received from the Old. Love involves understanding. It also involves frankness and the freedom to disagree in a brotherly way where there are reasons for it."

Pope John Paul II in his 1986 address to the American Jewish Committee



Neither an ecclesiastic nor a theologian, I hardly belong on a podium with the most illustrious religious leaders of France and America. The only credentials that can justify my presence here tonight—other than being both a New Yorker and a Parisian—is the Auschwitz number engraved on my arm, and our shared determination that the horrors perpetrated by man against man in this barbaric century, will never be repeated again.

During the *Shoah*—the crime of crimes against humanity—one third of an entire people had been wiped off the face of the earth with malice aforethought. An evil, pagan ideology had decreed us to be pariahs for no other reason than that we were born Jews. We were excluded from society, communal life and the professions. Our assets and belongings were Arianized, confiscated, or plundered. Our places of worship were desecrated or razed to the ground. And under the largely indifferent eyes of our Christian neighbors, we were tagged with the

yellow star of David and consigned to systematic extermination.

As an adolescent, struggling to survive in Europe's greatest inferno, where Hitler's grim reality eclipsed Dante's wildest imagination, I was convinced that if Jesus, his mother Mary, and the 12 apostles had lived in my time, they would have been with me at Auschwitz, because their blood was as tainted as mine. And in my innocence, while the gas chambers belched fire and smoke, I often raised a blasphemous fist to heaven and asked: "Where is God? Where is the Pope? Do they know what is happening here to us? Do they care?"

By placing the sins of the world on Jewish shoulders, Christian thinkers and inquisitors have often turned their backs on Christ himself, opening the way to persecution and mayhem.

Last year, in contrast to such incendiary rhetoric, and in the ecumenical spirit of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration solemnly adopted in 1965 by the Council of Vatican II, the Church of France made an extraordinary *mea culpa* for Catholic passivity and silence during the somber period of Nazi genocide and Vichy collaboration. The long, moving and densely written document stated: "The time has come for the Church to recognize the sins committed by its sons. . . . We implore the forgiveness of God and ask the Jewish people to hear these words of repentance."

Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, Archbishop of Paris, Primate of France, you played a crucial role in inspiring and crafting that historic document. My intuition told me so, as I stood with you and Chief Rabbi Sirat, listening to its public reading by an emissary of the conference of

Bishops at Drancy—the very site from which cattle trains had once transported innocent men, women and children to their doom.

We heard these words of repentance with tears in our eyes. Tears which came from the same well of sorrow, because our mothers, yours and mine, had both perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. And because both, like the mother of Moses, had given us life a second time, before they went off to die: one by hiding her first-born under the roof of a compassionate Catholic family; the other by dressing her first-born in long pants, so he would look like a grownup, fit for slave labor.

As chairman of a committee which helps Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Memorial find and honor the righteous among nations—gentiles who had risked their lives to save Jews during the *Shoah*—I can testify that you were saved from certain death by righteous French Christians.

In your new incarnation as a prince of the Church, you have consistently demonstrated that the memory of your Jewish childhood and salvation still lives within you, and that you are deeply dedicated to the cause of Christian-Jewish reconciliation. This cause has prospered considerably since the epoch-making reforms of tolerance adopted by the Catholic hierarchy under Pope John XXIII and endorsed by Pope John Paul II.

Karol Wojtyła is from a country upon whose living body was inflicted the massive wound of Auschwitz. He grew up in the shadow of that wound, and his ascent to the throne of Saint Peter was not unrelated to these origins. This became clear when he proclaimed to the world in 1980, "The *Shoah* is an experience which I carry within me." May God give him strength to

continue to speak out against the venomous roots of religious and secular anti-Semitism, which have bred so much hatred and violence.

Eternal gratitude is due to him and to you for such accomplishments as helping to relocate the controversial Auschwitz Carmelite convent to a more appropriate site. Yet today, hundreds of crosses are again being planted near the death camp, to a point which even the Polish Episcopate has found criticizable. Auschwitz, a cemetery without tombs or tombstones is sacred to us all. We are jointly responsible for ensuring that those who perished there can rest in peace.

Allow me to say also that Edith Stein, recently canonized as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was gassed at Auschwitz in 1942 not because she was a Carmelite nun, but because she had been born a Jew. His Holiness' announcement that Catholics will henceforth commemorate with us the *Shoah* year after year, warmed our hearts. But the proposal to hold such commemorations on August 9th, the day of the new saint's death, rather than the 27th of Nissan, established under the Hebrew calendar half a century ago as *Yom Hashoah*, to mourn the six million Jewish martyrs, may generate needless confusion and pain. Let us hope that the Vatican will not be indifferent to such concerns.

Eminence, on behalf of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, and in recognition of your immense and lifelong contributions to inter-faith harmony, it is now my great honor to confer upon you the *Nostra Aetate* Award. I do so with deep affection and friendship, confident that the dialogue between our two religions, which you have done so much to promote, will continue to flourish in mutual respect of one another's convictions and beliefs.



Jews and Christians, Tomorrow

How moving it is for me to be made to feel welcome in this famous and venerable synagogue, already over a century old! For this, I am deeply grateful to President Robert Berend and Rabbi Allan Schranz. I also wish to thank for their presence my brother Cardinal, Archbishop John O'Connor, and the French Consul in New York, the Honourable Richard Duqué.

Needless to say, my gratitude goes especially to Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, Dr. Anthony Cernera and all the officials of the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, and also to Dr. Samuel Pisar for introducing me with such thoughtfulness.

In addition, I wish to thank you all for caring to give me the *Nostra Aetate* Award by associating me with Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat, to whom I feel so close in respect and friendship. His pres-

ence here adds to the honor you are doing me. Your selection touches me more than you can imagine. May the Almighty bless your work and efforts.

If such an event can take place here in the United States, there must be a reason. You are all aware of the special conditions that the American history and culture have offered to Christian-Jewish relationships, in contrast with Europe and its tragedies. It is my intuition that, for the time being, you are more free than the Christians and Jews of the Old Continent, where the wounds of the past are still open,¹ to take advantage of all that has been accomplished in depth everywhere in the world, in Europe as well as in Israel.

Next year I will not fail to invite the Catholics of Paris to join the Jewish communities in prayers on *Yom Shoah*—the Day of the *Shoah*, April 13, 1999; 27 Nissan, 5759—in the spirit of penance and an act of faith in the Lord of the living and the dead. Perhaps what will be done in Paris can also be done elsewhere, and in particular in New York?

May I attempt to make one more step with you by wondering about the future of the relationships between Jews and Christians? Of course, I cannot erase from my heart and mind all the hardships whose persecutions have stamped the Jewish memory. But I will strive to investigate some of the confrontations and meetings, and even some of the contradictory convergences between Jewish consciousness and Christian consciousness over the last two millennia. For such a clarification is necessary to open a new dialogue that will not merely reproduce the controversies of past centuries.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS?

Half a century has passed since the end of the Second World War and the creation of the State of Israel. As we are nearing the third millennium of the Christians era, a new age has begun in the history of humankind. The relationships between Jews and non-Jews have been deeply changed over the last 50 years.

First of all, geographically. Most of the Jews who had been living—sometimes for more than 20 centuries—in regions which became Islamic countries have returned to Israel or emigrated to lands with a Western, mostly Christian culture. Furthermore, many Jewish survivors have left Europe and the former Soviet Union, and more are still doing so. One result of all these population movements, which started as early as the end of the 19th century, is that no nation, even Israel, has a greater number of Jewish residents today than the United States. France is the only European country where a comparatively large Jewish community has maintained and reconstituted itself, thanks to Sephardi immigration from North Africa.

These geographical movements correspond to cultural and spiritual transfers, and also to new types of relationships between Jews and Christians. The Europeans are likely to be insufficiently aware of the important work of collation which is currently under way within your nation. Most of them still do not know about the American encounter between the Jewish culture and the Christian cultures. This symbiosis is, in part, successor to the former cultural centers that made famous places like Prague, Warsaw, Vilno, Vienna, Berlin, and so many German uni-

versity towns, without forgetting Paris and London. America now welcomes yiddish voices that used to come from the *shtetl* of Poland, Russia and other East European nations before the *Shoah* and the Stalinian purges.

A study of cultural history covering the period from the end of the 18th to the end of this century should, of course, show the role played by Jews and Jewish sources in the culture of Western modernity. It should also point out the renewal of Jewish-Christian relationships since 1948, especially in the United States and more especially—this must be acknowledged—here in New York. The fact is that today Jews are respected when living among Western Christians, while the young State of Israel is immersed among the Muslim nations.

This radical change in the concrete conditions of Jewish existence is contemporaneous with a very different transformation: the *aggiornamento* intended by the Second Vatican Council for the Catholic Church, inviting her to reach beyond the exclusivism of the old European cultures. The fetters of national feelings and political determinisms had tightened up along the centuries, and they had contained for too long her spiritual dynamism within the limits of European references.

The tremendous economic and political changes that are taking place today make up the background against which the two upheavals I have evoked stand out—that is, the evolution of the Jewish condition and the renewal of the Catholic Church.²

A page is being turned in the history of humankind. Catholics, after all, have only been

obeying the words of Jesus when he explained the commandment, thou shall not kill: "So if you are presenting your gift at the altar and suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother; then come back and offer your gift" (*Matthew* 5:23-24). These words in the Gospel do not take into consideration what you think of yourself or the arguments by which you would like to justify yourself or protest of your innocence. They simply acknowledge the other's—your brother's—wound as he experiences it.

In Christian-Jewish relationships, Christians have opened their eyes and ears to the Jewish pain and wounds. They accept to be held responsible and agree to bear that burden without rejecting it on others. They have not tried to declare themselves innocent. If they have not asked for the victims' forgiveness, it is because they know that only God can grant forgiveness, as the Gospel according to *Matthew* (9:4) recalls, that only God knows what is in man's heart, and He is the only Judge. Jesus also says (*Matthew* 7:1), "Do not judge" (that is, do not substitute yourself for God), "and you will not be judged" (which means, God will not judge you).

In the name of truth, Christians ask the Jews to take part in their examination of conscience. In the French Bishops' *Declaration of Repentance* at Drancy on September 30, 1997, we did not want to insist on the role played by numerous Catholics to save a number of Jews in France. Indeed, this is something that Serge Klarsfeld has brought to light: if there were a good many survivors among French Jews, it is especially—though not exclusively—thanks to

Christians and more particularly the clergy. Some have reproached the Drancy *Declaration* for failing to emphasize this aspect of history. But how could we then have not yielded—even unconsciously—to the temptation to justify ourselves?

When the authorities of Yad Vashem instituted the recognition of the "Righteous Among the Nations," they meant, in the name of the Jewish people, to manifest a concern for the truth. With a book and a film, Marek Halter also wanted to remember these works of justice. Is this not also the significance of the "French Society to Honor the Righteous Among the Nations?" It has been created recently by Jean Kahn, president of the Central Consistory of France. On November 2, 1997, this organization inaugurated at Thonon-les-Bains the "Clearing of the Righteous," in the middle of which a memorial is standing to perpetuate the action of the men and women who risked their lives to save thousands of Jews from deportation and death. On this occasion, I sent the following message to the participants:

The Righteous remain hidden. They had to, when between 1940 and 1944 their courage saved thousands of Jews from the death camps. Today many remain hidden, unknown or ignored; some of them are forgotten forever. But their light shines under God's eyes, and warms up the hearts of the survivors who can remember.

I do remember the ones who provided me with forged documents. I do remember those who helped me get across the demarcation line.³ I do remember those who warned me that

I might be arrested soon. I do remember those who put me up without asking any questions. I do remember those whom I trusted and who never betrayed me. I do remember what they did for me in those times of dereliction. Yet I cannot remember their names or sometimes even their faces. Would I be able to recognize them if they are still alive? We are moved by the list of those who have been given the title of 'Righteous Among the Nations.' And we are no less moved when we think of so many unknown people to whom we shall never be able to say thank you. To perpetuate their memory is a duty for our generation with regard to the next. For the Righteous prove that the best, as well as the worst, can spring from man's heart.

Such gestures of mutual recognition allow us to interrogate ourselves more serenely about the ceaselessly reborn violence perpetrated against Israel, first by the ancient pagan anti-Judaism, then by Christian anti-Judaism with its tragic consequences in medieval and modern Europe, until the neo-pagan anti-Semitism of the contemporary era.

It would be an illusion to think that preaching tolerance or even educating to it is enough to eradicate incomprehension and rejection. Together, we still have to identify the causes of such fierce tensions. Making the decision to understand and love each other requires acknowledging what still

divides us and cannot be eliminated by human determination.

ELECTION AND JEALOUSY

It probably was the Jamnia Assembly which, in the year 90, excluded from the synagogue the Jews who had become disciples of Christ. Long before, as early as 50 or 60 A.D., Saul of Tarsus—Paul—had tried to arouse the "jealousy" of his Pharisee brothers against the pagans who were followers of the Messiah. As he wrote to the Romans (11:14), he "hoped to stir those of [his] own race to jealousy."

Under his pen, this suggests emulation in faithfulness to the election by the living God, not arrogant and homicidal envy. The "jealousy" that Paul expected was not the murderous envy which seizes Jacob's sons in front of their brother Joseph (*Genesis* 37), but the divine jealousy which is the burning face of loving predilection.

For Paul the Apostle, this is even the key to history, to the election, to the Covenant, and to Salvation: the "setting aside of the elect" as a "remnant" for "the reconciliation of the world." In this reserve and "setting aside" the Scriptures, and especially the prophets Isaiah (11:1; 60:21) and Daniel (11:7) see God making a

cutting or a shoot (*natzer*) spring from the holy root, so as to reconcile the world and lead it from death to life (cf. *Romans* 11:15).

The double significance of the term jealousy

It would be an illusion to think that preaching tolerance or even educating to it is enough to eradicate incomprehension and rejection. Together, we still have to identify the causes of such fierce tensions. Making the decision to understand and love each other requires acknowledging what still divides us and cannot be eliminated by human determination.

in the Bible, where it describes either human self-conceit or the divine care for man, induces a double reading of the Scriptures and a double behavior in history.

Among men jealousy is a caricature of love, which it aims to imprison and finally chases away. God's jealousy reveals the absolutism of love, the preference of the election, the intransigence of fidelity even when it is abandoned. Human jealousy leads to destroying the object of love; God's jealousy outreaches punishment and finally restores life—forever.

What has happened between Jews and Christians over the last 20 centuries is a tragedy of human jealousy usurping the appearance of divine jealousy. This jealous zeal, which was only too human, took up a different disguise depending on whether the simulators were Jewish or Christian.

1. Christian jealousy of Israel very quickly took the shape of a claim for a legacy: just get rid of the other, who is so close and yet so different! The substitution of Jacob for Esau—the younger son for the elder—has been used as a justification. But then what about Joseph, whom his brothers pretend to murder? This was conjuring the youngest away so as to retain the privilege of the father's love. So who is who among those biblical figures?

Several of the parables of Jesus deal with this issue of the legacy and its appropriation. One of these stories is especially grim. It is the case of the murder of the beloved Son, both the eldest and the only one, since the first-born is by definition unique. This parable (*Mark 12:1-12*) relates the slaying of this Son by those who are

only asked to take care of the vineyard. The point is that they want to seize it. To anyone who hears this story today, its significance is amazingly ambivalent, as it can be interpreted as foretelling the killing of either Jesus or Israel, the beloved Son.

The pagans who had become Christians gained access to the Holy Scriptures and to the Jewish festivals. But human—only too human—envy prompted them to marginalize or throw out the Jews. In their first efforts of evangelization, the Apostles Peter and Paul had meant to share with the pagans the grace received by the Jewish people. By celebrating the fulfillment of the messianic promises, the first apostles had generously allowed the pagans to keep a distinct status (*Acts 15:5-35*) alongside the Jews. But the number and might of the pagans who had entered the Church of the Messiah upset the inverted order of the dispensation of salvation. This movement tended to deprive the Jewish existence of its concrete, carnal, historical contents, and to consider the life of the Church until recent history, as the final achievement of Jewish hope and life. This was how the theory of substitution was developed.

When speaking of Jews and non-Jews, Paul had stated: "There is no such thing as Jew and Greek, slave and freeman, male and female" (*Galatians 3:28*. Cf. also *1 Corinthians 12:13*). He did not ignore the burdensome time of history and expectation. But in this dazzling insight he announced the achievement of God's design and the assumption of all peoples into the glory of the Resurrection.

"The Jews" and the "the Nations," these are biblical categories. Where are the Christians

then? The ancient way of speaking distinguished between Christian-Jews and Christian *goyim*. We can still find a trace of this on the old Roman mosaic of St. Sabine's (422-430 A.D.). Two figures can be seen on either side of the dedication—they are aging veiled women holding a book with this caption: "*Ecclesia ex circumcissione—Ecclesia ex gentibus.*"

The *Ecclesia ex circumcissione* survived as it could. But when Constantine granted the Christians a tolerance that was tantamount to a recognition of Christianity in the life of the State and eventually led to make it the religion of the Empire, the Jews were brutally rejected. This was a simplistic and unrefined way of denying redemption the time and child-birth labor that it requires, with completion "a day and hour no one knows" (*Matthew 24:36*). The mythology of the substitution of the Christian people for the Jewish people fostered a secret, inextinguishable envy and legitimated the captation of Israel's legacy, of which countless examples could be offered.⁴

This rivalry between brothers gave a specific turn to the relationships between Jews and Christians during the Middle Ages and even the modern times.⁵ The best minds knew that the Scriptures were received from the Jews, and also the Revelation, and—even more fundamentally—the source of salvation. In Antiquity many Christian theologians and spiritual figures learned Hebrew so as to read the Bible in its original language and gather from the rabbis the teachings of the

The best minds knew that the Scriptures were received from the Jews, and also the Revelation, and—even more fundamentally—the source of salvation. In Antiquity many Christian theologians and spiritual figures learned Hebrew so as to read the Bible in its original language and gather from the rabbis the teachings of the most ancient tradition.

most ancient tradition.

But at the same time, envy introduced an ugly bias in the encounters with Jews who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah any more than they agreed with the disintegration of their traditions and faithfulness in the Christian society, which they considered as pagan. This envy prompted many Christians to become involved in passionate polemics, and these eventually nurtured anti-Judaism, preparing its bloody, tragic manifestations with foul calumnies of ritual murders and so many other horrible lies which have reached our century through the "Protocol of the Wise Men of Zion" and anti-Semitic literature.

2. Can it be said that many Jews reciprocated and replied with symmetrical hostility?⁶ Those Christians were only *goyim*! Their claims were ungrounded! All that concerned them and touched them fell into the category of impurity. The only sensible behavior at the time and in the context of exile was to ignore them, to send them into the same spiritual vacuum as the other pagans. Why, the Jews thought, should Christianity—more than

any other non-Jewish religion—be entitled to some special consideration?

Moreover, all that specifically represented the Christian faith could only be understood as symbols of the violence and death whose victims were the Jews. These emblems could no longer in any way signify mercy, forgiveness, or love. They were but horrible pictures, which were

better not to look at, which must not be thought of or mentioned, as forebodings of death and supreme blasphemies!

However, this parallelism of Christian and Jewish spiritual attitudes could not be further developed, because the balance of power was blatantly unequal. Yet the reciprocity in lack of understanding and contempt remains eloquent. What is also significant is the affinities and contrarities that can be detected in the relation of both Jews and Christians to world history.

HISTORICAL TIME AND WORLD HISTORY

There is another aspect of the 20-century-old presence of Jewish communities among the Christian nations. The symmetry between the Jewish and Christian destinies proves to be even more contradictory than their attitudes towards the election.

1. After the last destruction of the Temple and the great dispersion, only the synagogue was left to the Jews, if we put aside the Jewish-Christian communities which disappeared little by little. The Diaspora was then organized with a cult in which the priests and the Levites were unable to perform their services, because the ritual sacrifices could no longer be offered. The Jews underwent this new trial, as they had already done during their deportation to Babylon, with a tremendous act of patient and imploring faith,

so that God would manifest His glory and fulfill His promises. The whole existence of the Jewish communities was entirely absorbed, in prayer and fidelity, by the accomplishment of their divine vocation. If a Christian notion may be borrowed here, it could be said that this life became "monastic," as had perhaps already been the case with the Essenian communities.

For centuries the Jews participated only marginally in human history, limiting themselves to existing and surviving. In some way, they

allowed themselves to be buried in history in order to be the witnesses of their faith and of their prophecies. They were hidden inside history and absent from history—except through misfortunes and persecutions. Without a land of their own, without being citizens, they used the languages of the nations that accepted their particu-

larity, but they kept at the heart of prayer the language of the Revelation. They were present everywhere and absent from everything.

As it had been deprived of the concrete, historic foundations of its existence by the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the people across the Empires, Israel concentrated all its strengths on the expectation of the achievement of history. Until the Age of the Enlightenment, Jewish existence deliberately concentrated itself



Cardinal Lustiger, Israeli Ambassador Shmuel Sisso and Cardinal O'Connor.

on compliance with the Commandments and the study of the Law. This separate life aimed at creating the conditions to hasten the glorious final coming of the Messiah. This Jewish existence was entirely centered on the way up towards the end of history.

2. The Christians of the nations, as far as they were concerned, should have remained aware that they were offered gratuitously—as a grace which they had not deserved—to take part in what God had granted to Israel. But they were permanently tempted, in the course of these last two millennia, to reduce to the particularities of their own history the final accomplishment of the divine design, whereas the latter always remains to be expected.

Jesus described to his disciples the time of history as a wake in the night, as the burdensome toil of the servant waiting for his master's return. Christians have too often failed to hear the watchword "patience" (*Luke* 8:15; 21:19. Cf. also *Romans* 2:7; 5:3; 8:25). It is in this patience, "through which you will appropriate your souls," which allows in faith to hope against all odds for the day of the Lord.

The Christian kingdoms ambitioned to become in history the temporal realization of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Church herself often occupied the space of the secular power, presenting herself as the actualization here below of the Kingdom of On High. Everything was as if the hope for the day to come was absorbed into history and its incompleteness, and reduced to the temporal present. Such religiosity, which was bound to be oppressive and intolerant, was incomprehensible and, in any case, unacceptable for the Jews whose only king was God and who

knew that no kingdom could claim to be God's kingdom, unless it was governed by God Himself in peace and justice. (Also note in passing that this temporal religiousness was found just as unbearable by the great spiritual figures whom the Holy Spirit has never tired of giving to the Church.)

Within the Christian existence, and repeatedly along the centuries, revival movements like monasticism have provided numerous men and women with a life of sanctity and perfection through obedience to the commandments and the divine precepts. Although the diversity of the times and cultures meant that methods were different, this path towards perfection was comparable to that of the Jewish existence. Indeed, consecrated life under its multiple forms aims at living within the course of time in a way that is entirely shaped by the messianic expectation. Yet, the existence of this spiritual orientation was no more understandable for most Jews, especially when it took up the appearance of the Spanish Inquisitors during the *Reconquista*.

The figure of the Suffering Innocent, especially as he is described in Chapter 53 of Isaiah, remains a point that Jews and Christians keep in common. But this is also where the contradiction reaches its greatest intensity.

First of all, the faith of any believer, be he Jewish or Christian, stumbles over God's incomprehensible injustice. The New Testament will describe this trial of faith by the Greek word, *skandalon*. How can its redemptive value be grasped?

In the second place, the very wording of the Scripture suggests that this is a figure of Israel,

but also of a messianic character. The blinding pains of history have obscured the vision of both Christians and Jews, so that we fail to recognize Israel in its Messiah or the Messiah hidden in Israel. Has the time of history been the time of the nations only to allow the Seed of Israel to sprout in them?

Jews and Christians have failed to understand each other and scorned each other in the darkness of history. They have also smothered their own hopes of the final gathering. As they are divided in their intelligence of the same election and the same expectation, they also have separate outlooks on the promised unity of humankind.

Professor Ady Steg, who is the president of the Universal Israelite Alliance, has recently initiated a biblical study of Isaiah 53,⁷ in which Jews and Christians were invited to participate. This common work in mutual respect is, to my eyes, an irrefutable sign of the beginning of a new era.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE BLESSING

Universality is the third aspect of the always contradictory symmetry drawn by history between Jews and Christians. The prophets have clearly announced that one day God will gather all the nations in the knowledge of His Name, as Isaiah has the Lord say (66:21), "And some of

them I shall take for priests and for Levites." This is the most unthinkable, yet most fundamental conviction.

1. Along these last two thousand years of history, the Jews were disseminated across the West European and Muslim worlds, as well as in every area where there were Christians, such as Asia, Africa, and finally, in the New World, in the wake of the great discoveries. During these feverish developments the Jews, who did not strive to gather the nations by associating them to the prayer of the sacerdotal people, remained scattered in their exile.



Rabbi Ehrenkrantz, Cardinal Lustiger, Cardinal O'Connor and Dr. Cernera.

In the 19th century they were charged with being stateless. They were perceived as a strange network across all the nations, with a special, mysterious and threatening solidarity, whereas they were the guardians of the promised universality, of the unification of all people in one single destiny. According to

the very words of God, all men have one single origin and one single vocation. God is the only God of the whole universe. As a result, all men have to consider themselves as brothers, as Adam's sons, made in the image and resemblance of the God who is their Creator and Father.

The diasporic condition of Israel could have been for humankind the pregnant symbol of this common destiny and of the promised unity.

However, either because they deliberately chose to protect themselves or because they had to, in order to take upon themselves their unbearable difference from the other nations and thus survive, the Jews lived through the dispersion by stressing their particularity and preserving their identity behind the fence of the Law.

2. At the same time the Christians, who were pagans of all languages, cultures, and races were being gathered by their faith in the messianic condition of Jesus, Son of Israel, and they reacted in a similar way. The Christians who receive the whole of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God are a living testimony that universalization is being accomplished. And yet, they have countless times duplicated the historical pattern that had instituted Israel as a nation, to the sole benefit of their particular languages, ethnic groups, cultures, kingdoms, and empires.

The new *ecclesia* (*kahal*) shrank in many places into historical specificities, even when this meant ignoring her universal vocation and mission. This was the case with the various national Churches, of which history gives so many examples, among the peoples of the Middle East, in Byzantium, in the Slavic world and across the Latin West. That is why, in these countries, for a long time the question was whether the king, patriarch, emperor, or the pope was the head of the Church. National and ethnic divides remain today the most serious threat to the unity and universal communion that Christians are called to bear witness to and to foster.

But we have entered a new age in the history of humankind and the fundamental conditions are being upset and turned upside down.

1. As far as the Jews are concerned, I would like to insist on two points.

First, with the progressive assertion of civil liberties in various European countries since the 18th century, many have given up the nearly monastic existence of the Jewish communities to take part in the great changes of civilization. Along with the Christians they have worked for the secular universalism which has built up itself on reason and also on the ambition of human rights. The Jews have often joined the Christians in the miscalculations and faults which were caused by human presumption, while they were the first victims of these advances, which backfired with unprecedented selective cruelty.

Secondly, following the example of the European nations and thanks to their participation in the dramatic evolution of civilization and culture, they have managed to create the State of Israel by picking up the standards of a particular national identity. They have thus radically renewed the question of the Jewish identity, which is now torn between two poles: on the one hand, the pole of consecrated life whose only true home is given by God at the end of times; and on the other hand, the pole of the secular existence of a people asserting its identity, its language, at long last reconstituted, its ambitions, and its national strength. With Israel the Jewish people has reintegrated the common history of the nations, as a new reference and as a mystery.

2. Simultaneously, the Catholic Church—and perhaps Christianity as a whole—has begun a journey in the opposite direction. During the contemporary era, the Catholic Church has more

than ever freed herself from the domination of the princes and from national identifications. While she openly values the latter as a cultural wealth, she will not accept their becoming absolute references and her different type of action clearly bears witness to this resistance.

At the heart of this moment—and this has been taught explicitly by Christian theologians such as Louis Bouyer, Yves Congar and Henri de Lubac (to mention, the French only)—lies the rediscovery of faith as a hope immersed in history, and also the rediscovery of the vocation to which are called all those who hear as God's Word what Jesus said: "You must be perfect because your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Matthew* 5:48), recalling *Leviticus* 19:2: "You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy."

After the *Shoah*—but not only because of the *Shoah*—the determination to recognize and respect the gifts granted to the Jewish people in the history of salvation, and the rediscovery of perpetuity of the existence of the people of Israel, and of its fidelity, are for Christians the fruit of their rediscovery of their own wealth and vocation. This is not simply a more humane attitude beyond prejudice and hatred. But ever more unassuming hope is inherent to the messianic faith in God as the Savior. Expecting the Kingdom of justice and peace leaves the Christian with the humbling certainty that he or she knows neither the time nor the hour of the end of history.

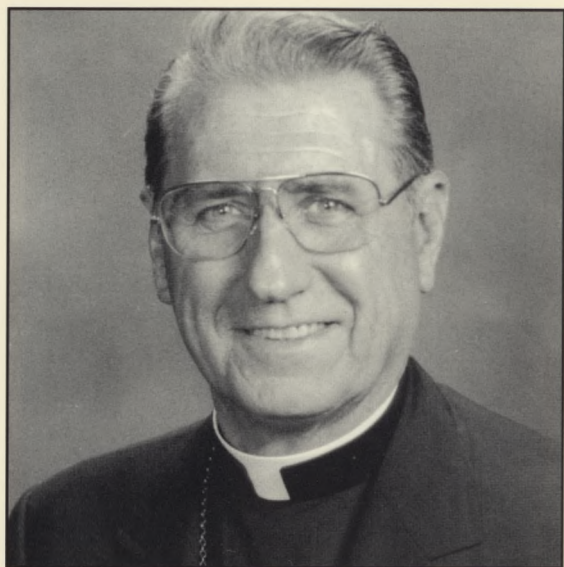
The spiritual logic of the blessing recalls the grace of the origin and the loving care of "the promise made to our forefathers to show mercy to Abraham and his children's children forever" (Luke 1:55) and "to all the peoples on earth" (Genesis 12:3). This is the task which the Catholic Church and many Christians want to carry out today.

The spiritual logic of the blessing recalls the grace of the origin and the loving care of "the promise made to our forefathers to show mercy to Abraham and his children's children forever" (*Luke* 1:55) and "to all the peoples on earth" (*Genesis* 12:3). This is the task which the Catholic Church and many Christians want to carry out today. Of course, one confession must be added immediately. This new awareness was condensed for the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* Declaration. In the last 30 years it has given way to many comments, especially because of the initiatives of Pope John Paul II. However, this new understanding still has to remodel in depth the ideas of many peoples who belong to the Christian sphere but whose hearts have not yet been purified by the Spirit of the Messiah. Historical experience shows us that lasting "patience" and many educational efforts are required to "appropriate one's soul" (*Luke* 21:19).

Notwithstanding, there is no steering away from the direction we are now following. This is part of the movement through which humankind is being united, even at the cost of confrontations. This orientation testifies to the Catholic Church's determination to carry out her mission in the service of this world, to do the will of the Creator of Israel and Redeemer of humanity.

Notes

- 1) Note the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* which was solemnly adopted by the Second Vatican Council on October 28, 1965, and also the French Bishops' Declaration that was released on September 30, 1997 at the Memorial of Drancy, from where practically all of the 75,000 Jewish victims who were French residents were sent to the extermination camps. Also see the Holy See's Declaration in its English original as it was published at the Vatican on March 12, 1998 under the title: "We Remember: Reflections on the Shoah." Finally, I wish to mention Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy's address to the American Jewish Committee in Washington, D.C. on May 15, 1998. These four documents enlighten each other, and they recall a number of facts and circumstances which I will not repeat here.
- 2) The authorized ecclesial Declarations mentioned in note (1) above accomplish a return to the past. They put an end to the teaching of contempt. They turn our minds towards the future, as John Paul II wished in his letter to Cardinal Cassidy approving of the Roman document on the Shoah: "May memory play its necessary role in the process of the building up of a future where the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will become forever impossible. May the Lord of history guide the efforts of Catholics and Jews as well as of all men and women of good will, so that they may work together for a world where the life and dignity of each human being will be genuinely respected, since all have been created in God's image and resemblance."
- 3) The demarcation line divided France into two zones: one occupied by the Germans, and one under the control of the Vichy government.
- 4) I will mention only one: the French kings' claim to descend from David. This led their advisors to have them crowned according to the ritual designed for the kings of Israel, as reported in the Bible and as had already been done in Byzantium. See, for instance, Marquis de la Franquerie. (1984). *Ascendances Davidiques des Rois de France*. Sainte Jeanne d'Arc edition, p. 79.
- 5) One cannot honestly ignore the fourth century and the beginning of anti-Jewish rationalization, particularly with St. Cyrillus of Jerusalem. The theory of substitution was elaborated by the Church Fathers.
- 6) Many Jews, but not all of them: before the Christians started rethinking the role of Judaism positively, the Jews had acknowledged with Maimonides that Christianity had been given a certain mission.
- 7) This is how Professor Steg explained the goal of this work, under the authority of the College of Jewish Studies: Chapter 53 of the prophet Isaiah has undoubtedly been one of the most controversial texts in the history of monotheism. In the foretelling of the messianic drama, Christians saw a prefiguration of Christ's Passion, while Jews read the story of the trials of Israel in its exile. However, beyond the eschatological stakes, the idea of redemption through suffering does sound even more forceful in Isaiah's words. Does suffering play a role in history of *gueula* (Redemption)? Might not this interpretation distort Isaiah's words by giving them a significance that they do not have? At a time when democracies tend to be overcome by victimary morals, can the study of these verses help us to clarify the question? What do both Jewish and Christian theologians and psychoanalysts have to say on the place of suffering in the human condition?



It is always nice for me to come to a place where all the men dress like I do. [Gesturing to his kepeo] It is also beautiful to see a couple holding hands in a synagogue. They were in my residence earlier this evening for a reception and told me that they are soon getting married. They did not have to tell me that. They look so radiant.

Although it is my great privilege to present to Rabbi Rene-Samuel Sirat, it is first my obligation to warn you about Cardinal Lustiger—despite all of these lovely things said of him. The warning is simple and straightforward. A few years ago we invited Cardinal Lustiger to come and give an address on Erasmus at the Union League in New York. The Union League had a fire so the address had to be held in a Church. Most of you know that this event was originally scheduled to take place at the Central Synagogue which recently burned down. I will never, never invite Cardinal Lustiger to St. Patrick's Cathedral.

I am always humbled when I am in your

presence, Cardinal Lustiger, and I say that with deepest sincerity. I was not only humbled but also profoundly moved by Dr. Pisar's eloquent introduction of you, my very good friend.

I would like to ask Dr. Pisar to see if the way that he quoted the Pope was in fact what the Pope said or what journalists said about the Pope. It seems to me that this was what a journalist quoted about the Pope. So much good has been said about this Pope. Admittedly, I am prejudiced. Not only because he is the Pope and I am a cardinal—although, that is a pretty good reason to be prejudiced—you know you do not buy these things in any store [pointing to his kepeo]—but because of my deep love for him and respect for him. He is always deeply pained when he is interpreted as saying something that would be justifiably considered offensive. I will be in Rome in a couple of weeks and I will be audacious enough to ask the Holy Father's clarification of this.

This has little to do and much to do with the award to be presented to Rabbi Rene Samuel Sirat. Little to do with it because he himself is a man of very little, if any, prejudice. Much to do with it because he is a man who has spent his life seeking understanding, seeking clarification, and trying to transmit his own insights—especially to students. His biographical data is illustrious and extensive. Time would not permit, nor would it be necessary to go beyond these few notations.

Rabbi Sirat is married and has three children. He was educated at the rabbinical school in France, the National School of Oriental Languages and at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He was surely called by God to do what he has done. His rabbinical career and vocation has included

being professor at the Rabbinical School of France, Chief Rabbi of France, and president of the Conference of European Rabbis, from which he has now retired for about a year. He was Chief Rabbi of France when Cardinal Lustiger became Cardinal of Paris.

He may consider himself an aging man but I consider him a rather young man. He was born in 1930. As one who was born in 1920 I do not want to offend him by calling him a youngster. It reminds me that in 1995, when I was 75 years of age, as is required by Church law, I submitted my resignation to John Paul II. I told him that I was 75 and that I had been very happy and that I would be more than willing to accept his mandate, which I assumed was retirement. A handful of weeks later I received a message which said, "Don't call me, I'll call you."

Earlier this year when I was having lunch with him I said, "Holy Father, you recall in January of 1995 I told you that I was 75 and now I am 78." He said, "So am I."

Rabbi Sirat's decorations and honors are multitudinous including the Education Prize given by the president of the State of Israel in 1981 and the Legion of Honor given by the French government in 1982. But it is his academic career which is most important to me. He has been consistently a professor, a teacher. It is impossible to be involved in Jewish-Catholic relations without knowing of the Chief Rabbi of France. He has been, above all, a teacher. And it is as a teacher that I would like to personally honor him very briefly by a Hassidic tale told by professor Ellie Wiesel, another eminent teacher.

Rabbi Hananiah Ben Turadian was one of the ten martyrs of the faith in Roman times. In those

days to teach the Torah or to study it meant capital punishment. Rabbi Hananiah decided to teach the Torah, not clandestinely, but in the market place. Naturally, he was arrested. The Romans sentenced him to be burned. They wrapped him in the Torah, in the scrolls, and lit the fire. As he was burning his disciples said, "Rabbi, tell us, what do you see?" "What do I see?" he said, "The parchments are burning, but the letters remain alive. The letters are indestructible!"

When I read this story as a child I would cry. First, because it was Yom Kippur and then because of its beauty that the Jewish spirit is invincible and indestructible; the tale of the Jewish people cannot be destroyed. Jews may be killed but not the story of the Jewish people.

I love this story. But when I re-read the story I became terribly annoyed with the students who, while their teacher is suffering, suddenly become journalists. They want to know what he sees. One almost expects them to ask next, "What is your opinion of Roman politics?" Was this the time for such questioning?

When I re-read it the third time I made my peace with it because I read it as a teacher. Suddenly it made sense. Here was a dying man. His disciples were gathered around him. When he suffered, they also suffered. What greater gift could they bring him, what truer offering could they give him than the feeling that he was still their teacher? They asked him a question and he answered them. With his last breath, with his last words, he is a teacher making one of the most beautiful statements in Talmud; words do not disappear. It is as a teacher that he leaves them.

Rabbi Sirat, it is as a teacher that I presume to ask you to accept this *Nostra Aetate* award.



WHAT CAN WE, JEWS, LEARN FROM *NOSTRA AETATE*?

The *Shoah*, this appalling event, caused our people to be a martyred people, once again. The psalmist wonderfully expressed our grief and our faith:

“It is for Your sake, Lord, we are being massacred all the day long and counted as sheep for the slaughter.”¹

“Though our hearts had not turned away, though our steps had not left your path.”²

When the Catholic Church discovered the absolute horror, its accomplices and its silences which cast shame on the European nations; when it realized what had occurred in Christian

lands, in a country which had reached an unequaled cultural level, it made *teshuva*. While saying this, by no means do we have the right to forget the exemplary courage and the admirable dignity of the Righteous Among the Nations. On the contrary, it is our duty to remember them, and I would like to invoke today the names of Cardinal Saliege, the Archbishop of Toulouse, Bishop Theas of Montauban, and Bishop Pezeril, the Auxiliary Bishop of Paris.

Cardinal Lustiger has reminded us of the outlines of this bright and exemplary *teshuva*. Both of us sat under the chairmanship of the admirable Cardinal Decourtray, Primate of the Gauls, and tireless Theo Klein, the C.R.I.F. chairman, at the Geneva discussions which led to the departure of the Carmelites from Auschwitz.

Still, there remains a long way to go for this *teshuva* to reach its full achievement. The Nazis will wallow in ignominy forever, yet they also had accomplices: the Papon trial which has just ended in France demonstrated this clearly. Other Nazi criminals and collaborators have been judged and sentenced, other accomplices have been passive. And what should we think of those like President Roosevelt or Prime Minister Churchill, who could have bombed Auschwitz and the tracks which led to the extermination camps? In this way, they could have upset significantly the Nazis' work of death, as they were asked to do insistently by the prisoners themselves. Also, what should we think about those who, like the people of Edom castigated by Obadiah the prophet, who “remained as silent, as indifferent,”³ when the people of the eternal covenant with God were being murdered. Although the bishop of Rome, pope of these times of despair, saved the lives of Roman and

Italian Jews, the silence of the former papal *nuncio* to Berlin or of the fighting French hero on the London radio was sadly eloquent. . . . And I will not talk about the greedy accomplices who held the highest posts at Swiss, Swedish, and Portuguese state banks.

And now, despite the carefully chosen remarks, the announcement of the imminent canonization of Edith Stein cannot be felt as anything other than an offense inflicted upon the survivors of the *Shoah* who remained faithful to the God of Israel during these hard times. The reply of the Jewish people to their persecutors was striking. Two verses followed our brothers and sisters on their final path to the gas chambers: "Listen Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord."⁴ "Jerusalem, if I forget you, may my right hand wither."⁵

And immediately after the war, before a stunned world, our people made the promises expressed in these two verses come true. In Israel, our brothers resurrected the Promised Land and declared Jerusalem to be their uppermost joy! They recalled their resolution to stand by their commitments made 330 years ago at the foot of Mount Sinai, and in the Declaration of Independence, referred explicitly to the tutelary rock of Israel. Recently, the 50th anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel was dazzlingly celebrated all over the world, and there were good reasons for this.

Yet, it is not only the "Preamble" of the *Declaration of Independence* that is worth quot-

ing today. We should also mention the explicit assertion of a policy of making friendly overtures with Middle-East countries—the will to be on good terms with neighboring countries and to live with them in peace and in mutual respect. Also striking is the determination to emphasize the democratic character of the newborn state by granting its citizens equal rights and duties, regardless of sex, ethnic group, or religion.

Forty-five years later, when three recipients of the Nobel Prize for Peace—the late and lamented Rabin, Peres and Arafat—signed the agreement in Oslo, thus making history during their lifetime, the great expectations which had been raised were at the peak of the Utopia dreamed

of by the founding fathers. Alas! A hired Jewish assassin and his accomplices murdered those expectations. Arab terrorists plunged the squares of Tel-Aviv, of Ramat-Gan, and the streets of Jerusalem into a blood bath. Together, the Jewish terrorists, like Igal Amir or Baruch Goldstein who murdered Muslims at prayer at the tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, and Arab terrorists of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah or of

the Palestinian Hamas, have attempted to put an end to this great and beautiful adventure called the "search for peace."

Today, borrowing the President of Israel, Ezer Weizman's expression, the frail skiff which constituted the Oslo agreements got stuck in the recantations of *the consultative referendum* (!) or the Second Council of Madrid which, in those times when the virtual seemed to be predomi-

We should also mention the explicit assertion of a policy of making friendly overtures with Middle-East countries—the will to be on good terms with neighboring countries and to live with them in peace and in mutual respect.

nant, would look like the First Council of Madrid as the virtual Moses of Spielberg's remarkable film, *The Prince of Egypt*, would look like the biblical hero.

We heard the voices of a number of rabbis cursing the Oslo agreements and the voices of some politicians who held important ministerial functions minimizing the seriousness of the responsibility taken by those who were acquainted with the plans of assassinating Prime Minister Rabin and took care not to denounce them, thereby justifying the budget which the state still granted them after their guilty silence. We also heard the voice of the incense bearers of the murderer of Hebron who built a mausoleum over his tomb. We heard the students of the *Ateret Cohanim*, yeshiva-sponsored, extreme-right American Jews, who called for "death to the Arabs" (6/29/98) in the presence of the Israeli Prime Minister and of the rabbis who trained them and taught them the Torah, without even exploding in indignation and imposing severe penalties. Moreover, in this case, they should have punished them quickly.

These were not the only tacit approvals and megalomaniac plans of the Prime Minister and the mayor of Jerusalem. By the way, this was disapproved by other mayors (belonging to the same party!) of the cities situated on the west side of the Jerusalem corridor as well as by those east of Jerusalem who have the feeling, due to the lack of preliminary coordination-ordination, of a threatening annexation. In this way, the peaceful coexistence of the inhabitants of Jerusalem has been endangered, while thus far, the successive governments of the left as well as the right have not cared to undermine such a fragile balance.

Recently, two Israeli youngsters, minors, who had (Alas!) already committed acts of violence, were put into a rehabilitation center in the dangerous town of Hebron. They are accused of killing a Palestinian man, father of 12 children, who was on his way back from work. What struck me as blasphemy was their appearance on the Israeli television, wrapped up in a *talith*, the prayer shawl, which symbolizes purity of intentions and of acts. I do not think the authorities should have allowed such a perversion of this symbol, and the rabbinate should have protested firmly. Alas! I heard nothing but silence.

But who muffled the voices of the rabbis, princes of peace? Where are the masters and the teachers who comment untiringly on the *Pirke Abot*, the maxims of the Fathers of the synagogue? Hillel, in 1st century AD used to say, "Be of the disciples of Aaron who loved peace and who loved humankind and brought them nigh to the Torah."⁶

In my speeches and with my pen, I have spoken modestly of peace, fraternity, and love for one's fellow humans. In France, I had almost no feedback to my words. Obviously, peace speeches are not popular in these times. And here, I think, the courage of the Church ought to serve us as an example.

An act of collective *teshuva* is necessary. I do not mean that a comparison can be upheld between the *Shoah* and the present situation of the Israeli people. All such assertions represent a blasphemy and an offense to memory. Yet, the moral process can be a source of inspiration.

TESHUVA TOWARDS OUR MOTHERS, SISTERS, SPOUSES, AND DAUGHTERS

Orthodox Judaism and its spiritual authority has great efforts to accomplish. I would like to speak about the status and the role of the modern, observant Jewish woman in the framework of the community.

Our sisters, our spouses, our daughters have achieved by sheer willpower (and alas, without our help, when it wasn't against our will!) the achievement of their legitimate place in society. They have become influential political leaders and leading personalities of the civil society: university professors, high-flying researchers, doctors and surgeons of

international rank, talented lawyers. . . . Even in the community councils—and I welcomed it—women have asserted themselves. From the council that elected the *aschkenazi* Chief Rabbi of Israel to the Consistoire of Paris (the largest organized Jewish community in the world), four women candidates were elected at the first, second, third, and fifth place of the council, thus, better placed by the electorate than their male colleagues. After hearing the most exalted rabbinical authorities say that their candidacy was inadmissible, they were warmly greeted by the

Chief Rabbi of France. Deep down, what were their feelings at that moment?

But in the synagogue, what place—in the proper meaning as in the figurative one—is kept for them? Did the Chief Rabbis climb up even once, to the *Ezrat Nashim*, the mezzanine where our sisters are confined? Have these rabbis once prayed at the *kotel*, the wailing wall, the last remnants of our Temple, next to the “storehouse”

intended for women, who cannot hear anything, cannot see anything, and cannot take part in the service in any way?

Old pictures from the time of Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Palestine, show the faithful, men and women, next to each other, facing the Wall. Have we

become more “religious” than our fathers or grandfathers?

In my double career, as a Rabbi and as an academic, I must admit that I have had to adopt an attitude that verges on schizophrenia. As the director of the greatest department of Jewish studies in Western Europe, I have helped the careers of my women colleagues as much as it was possible. God is my witness. On the other hand, as Chief Rabbi of France and as President of the Board of Directors of the Rabbinical



Rabbi Ehrenkrantz and Rabbi Sirat enjoy a light moment.

Seminary of France, I have failed miserably. My proposals towards a progressive change of our ways of thinking and of reacting were not followed by deeds.

As the spiritual leader of a large Parisian Orthodox community, I recently asked the architect entrusted with the project of building a large Parisian synagogue, to provide for a first floor space for women, with a separate entrance, that would enable them to follow every part of the service without the feeling of being pushed or herded into the background.

Why have we neglected to codify the *Bat Mitzvah* ceremony? In a constantly evolving society, the 13-year-old brother receives all the honors and his 12-year-old sister, a quiet and hasty ceremony, with no real participation of the young girl entering into the community of Israel.

Once our sisters have become university professors, how can we deny them the right to preach in synagogues? Do we lack historical examples—Talmudic or medieval—of highly talented women personalities? Has not the rabbi who codified the *Mishnah* exemplified his moral integrity by acknowledging that the meaning of a verse from Jeremiah had been given to him by the maid-servant who worked in his house? She knew what *matate* [broom] meant.

When will we take up the noble challenge of the Bible where a woman like Deborah was named supreme judge in Israel? Will the *halakha* forever be against the recovering of those great principles? If Rabbenou Gershom, light of the exile, had hesitated for a moment when he initiated the interdict against polygamy, which still lasts today, a thousand years after the

decision, then nothing would have changed.

What should we say about the humiliation often experienced by our sisters when they must go to the rabbinical seminary for matters of divorce, levirate, or conversion? Are we aware of the shame they suffer, of the feeling of rebellion that grips them?

Finally, can we still justify the inadmissibility of a woman's oath? How can we justify the fact that a woman, who can legitimately elect or play a part in the failure of the Chief Rabbi of Israel (or of Paris), cannot state that her childhood friend is indeed, single?

TESHUVAH TOWARDS OUR PEOPLE

Along with the great realizations of the pioneers, came morally blameworthy acts. The brother of an influential minister who represents a local council in a developing town, spoke emotionally of the tragedy experienced by his family. They were originally from Iraq and a little child (brother of the current minister) just disappeared after being hospitalized. Doubts remain about his fate. Is he dead or has he been "adopted" by an *aschkenazic* childless family? The tragedy of missing Yemenite children appears in the Israeli news from time to time without these terrible accusations being made absolutely clear.

General Barak's attempt to beg pardon of the *Sefaradim* for the bad reception their parents and grandparents had received is a step in the right direction, although it lacks the spirit of a solemn act of adopting a historical outlook. The tremendous scandal caused by General Uri Oz poses the problem of the legitimacy of the very existence and survival of the Labor Party in

Israel whose historical merits are huge, but whose historical faults are huge also. Alas!

The unity of the Israeli people can be rebuilt only if we move beyond the ideological rifts and definitely assert our political will to focus on the goal and the means of strengthening our social fabric. The setting up of a social plan, fundamentally different from the current rage of uncontrolled liberalism, of which America experiences today, with its risks and limits, is necessary.⁷

Above all, a *teshuva* is necessary because the study of Jewish tradition by the majority of the people has been forsaken. Recently the question, “What does the expression ‘rich as Qorakh’⁸ mean?” was prepared for a group of 12th grade Israeli children. Their reply was not, “I don’t know who Qorakh was,” which, in itself, would have been sadly eloquent, but “What is Qorakh?” understanding the proper noun as an object, as a thing. When the majority of the People of the Book, give up the Book, they endanger themselves.

“They [the children of Israel] deserted Me, said the Lord, and did not keep my Torah.” The rabbinical commentary on this verse is sublime: “Oh! If the children of Israel had *only* deserted Me,” said the Lord, “but had observed My Torah, I would have forgiven them, for the light it sheds would have set them again on the right path!”

I say to those who declare themselves secular, agnostic: Come back, make *teshuva*, study the Torah, even without practicing the *Mitzvoth*. In it, you will find the answers to questions that

assault you, when the death of ideologies—all ideologies of right and left—leave you in a state of utter confusion. At least, allow your children to find the roots which you so badly lack. You know well that “man does not live on bread alone!”¹⁰ Choose the masters that will teach your children, genuine masters who reconcile their teaching and their acts, but also open-minded, generous and available masters, capable of understanding the questionings of our time without always being armed with over-confident certitude.

TESHUVA TOWARDS THE PALESTINIANS AND THE PEOPLES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

At first, allow me to claim that I have been a Zionist since my adolescence, even before the creation of the State of Israel, and I am proud of it. I am not connected in any way to any so-called post-Zionist trend.

Zionism has great accomplishments to its credit, and far from being ashamed of it, we are very proud of it. The resurrection of the Hebrew language is a miracle. Up until this day, no people or nation had succeeded in reviving a language of which only “dry bones,” revered and respected ancient texts, remained.

Experiences of life were communicated either by Judeo-something dialects, or by the language of the Diaspora land where shelter had been found.

Zionism succeeded in integrating Jews coming from 70 regions of the world. It succeeded in making out of this magma of traditions and

*On 36 occasions,
the Torah reaffirms,
“You shall love the
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diametrically opposed ways of life, a people accomplishing the most high-tech technologies, a nation which can defend itself when being attacked (and how often has it happened!), a land which, after the scarcity of hard times that followed the independence, lives in plenty and in abundance. As early as in the Talmud, it is written about the wonderful verse: "You, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruits to my people of Israel, for they are at hand to come."¹¹

Rabbi Akiba used to teach, "No sign of the close coming of the Messiah is as blatant as the abundance of the wells on earth, because then, the coming of the Redemption is close."¹² I was reminded about this text a few years ago when the small state of Israel had the opportunity to send a food surplus to Great Russia.

*There is no
holy war.*

*Only peace
is holy.*

The transformation of the Jewish citizen is also a spectacular success. During the centuries of the Middle Ages, a number of professions were forbidden to Jews. This led to a hyper-specialization in certain professions, and in a perverse manner, this hyper-specialization became one of the most usually mentioned causes for the hatred of Jews. Now Jewish farmers who till the land, and rabbis, who have updated the rules concerning the fallow year every 7 years and the jubilee, finally agree with the compatibility of the *mitzvot* forbidding any work on Saturdays and the necessary continuity of public utility. All these things constitute a true revolution in the full and positive meaning of the Word, and the credit of it entirely rests with Zionism.

The Torah also tells us the rules which govern our relations towards others, towards the

stranger. On 36 occasions, the Torah reaffirms, "You shall love the stranger as yourself."¹³ Considering the conciseness of the biblical text, such an insistence bears considerable weight. It is by this moral obligation that the success of the Project of Return, of the redemption of the Land of the Promise, should be evaluated. This, of course, excludes the exception where the Bible speaks about idolatrous tribes whose perversion had reached the level of absolute horror, symbolized by the worship of Moloch, "who lived on human victims who were offered up alive in the fire of the idolatrous worship."¹⁴ Thank God, the inhabitants of the Land of the Promise are all monotheistic believers, or at least people connected to biblical culture and morals, to whom the rules concerning the converts of the Gate apply, and those who have accepted the seven Noahide laws and observe them.¹⁵

Ezechiel tells us on the occasion of the Great Return, at the time of the division of the land of Israel between the recovered tribes:

This land you shall divide for yourselves among the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as a heritage for yourselves and for the strangers who reside among you, who have begotten children among you. You shall treat them as Israelite citizens, they shall receive allotments along with you among the tribes of Israel. You shall give the stranger an allotment within the tribe where he resides, declares the Lord God.¹⁶

Yet, on this ground, Zionism has failed. Golda Meir thought she could assert that the Palestinian people did not exist.¹⁷ Menahem

Begin, Itshak Shamir refused any sharing out, and during the Intifada, Itshak Rabin talked about "beating the Palestinians black and blue," which he later recanted. The nobility of the Six Days War hero, Shimon Peres, Rabin's opponent at the time, said negating the Palestinians was a serious moral fault. As a Jew, the idea that his own people would seek to rule over another people (the Palestinian people) could no longer be acceptable. For this, Rabin and Peres completely deserved the Nobel Prize for Peace. Yet, the duty of the rabbis to make *teshuva* towards the Palestinians remains. It is the duty of Israel to avoid any vain moral or physical sufferings and to call their people to make *teshuva*. Yet, we ought to proclaim loud and clear the duty to defend the threatened state of Israel by all the means that modern technology places at our disposal.

There is no holy war. Only peace is holy.¹⁸ But peace cannot be unilateral. If your enemy wants your destruction, you must use all the means of defense at your disposal, even the death of the assailant.¹⁹

And what is true towards the Palestinians is also true towards the Lebanese. The tragedy of Sabra and Shatilla, where Christians killed Muslims, probably would not have occurred if it were not for the dramatic consequences of the war between Israel and Lebanon. The Israeli army was present in Lebanon and did not prevent the slaughtering.

TESHUVA TOWARDS THE WORLD

Since 1945, after the dreadful *Shoah*, the nations of the world, in their entirety, have shown signs of a real *teshuva*. In return, in a conscious or unconscious manner, they are expecting Israel to become again the "wise and discerning people"²⁰ referred to in the Bible. Also, at this time ideologies are dying and People-Witnesses can become again the People of the Word, the people of the message, the people of ethics, in short, "the light of the nations."²¹

And now, the creation of an international court to judge war crimes has been announced. This positive initiative should have benefited from Israel's patronage. It is a step forward toward an international justice beyond national boundaries. For home policy reasons, however, Israel voted against this creation. Hence, the "visionary spirit"²² mentioned by the prophet is at the moment, overshadowed by the problems of daily survival. Therefore, a new spirit is necessary. We must return to the sources,²³ the spirit of life, of hope and the healing of souls.²⁴ The world expects this from us. Then, the Divine promises will be realized, for they cannot be rendered null.²⁵ "When humanity's ways please the Lord, He makes his enemies be at peace with him."²⁶

Above all:
And I will bring them home to dwell in Jerusalem. They shall be my people and I will be their God in truth and sincerity.²⁷

Therefore, a new spirit is necessary. We must return to the sources, the spirit of life, of hope and the healing of souls. The world expects this from us. Then, the Divine promises will be realized, for they cannot be rendered null.

And there will be sowing of peach: the vine shall produce its fruits, the ground shall produce its yield, and the skies shall provide their moisture. I will bestow all these things upon the remnant of this people. And just as you were a curse among the nations, O House of Judah and House of Israel, so will I save you and you shall be a blessing. Have no fear, take courage.¹²⁸

These are the things you are to do: speak the truth to one another, render in your gates truth and judgments that are made for peace. And do not contrive evil against one another and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, says the Lord.²⁹

The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the Lord, and to seek the Eternal-Tsebaot, I will go too.' The many peoples and the multitude of nations shall come to seek the Eternal-Tsebaot in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of God.³⁰

Thus says the Eternal-Tsebaot: In those days, ten men from nations of every tongue will take hold—they will take hold of every Jew by a corner of his cloak and say, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'³¹

Our *teshuva*, followed by the *teshuva* of humankind will lead to universal peace and harmony. In other words, the messiah riding on an ass will enter into a Jerusalem³² of justice,³³ faithfulness, holiness,³⁴ fraternity, and peace. In that time, Israel will have accomplished God's will and will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.³⁵

Notes

- 1) Psalm 46:23.
- 2) Psalm 46:18.
- 3) Obadiah 1:2.
- 4) Deuteronomy 6:4.
- 5) Psalm 137:4.
- 6) Maxims of the Fathers of the Synagogue I:12.
- 7) The recent reunion in Davos which gathered the best economists in the world put the emphasis on the risks of a world left to the sole market economy, with no social or political balance.
- 8) Numbers 16:1-2.
- 9) Jeremiah 16:11.
- 10) Deuteronomy 8:3.
- 11) Ezechiel 36:8.
- 12) Talmud of Babylon, Treatise Sanhedrin 98B.
- 13) Leviticus 19:33.
- 14) Leviticus 16:21; cf. also Deuteronomy 12:31.
- 15) Cf. Maimonides; Code of the Kings, Chapter 9.
- 16) Ezechiel 47:21-23.
- 17) Cf. her autobiography.
- 18) Misna Uqsin 3.
- 19) Talmud of Babylon, Treatise Berakhot 55A; cf. Maimonides.
- 20) Deuteronomy 4:6.
- 21) Isaiah 49:6.
- 22) Ezechiel 37:14.
- 23) Hosea 14:2.
- 24) Malachi 3:20.
- 25) I Samuel 15:29.
- 26) Proverbs 16:7.
- 27) Zechariah 8:8.
- 28) Zechariah 8:12-13.
- 29) Zechariah 8:16-17.
- 30) Zechariah 8:21-23.
- 31) Zechariah 9:9.
- 32) Isaiah 1:26.
- 33) Zechariah 8:3.
- 34) Zechariah 9:9.
- 35) Exodus 19:6.

DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS*

VATICAN II, *NOSTRA AETATE*, 28 OCTOBER, 1965^a

1. In this age of ours, when men are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.

All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men (cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:6-7; 1 Tim. 2:4) against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city which is illumined by the glory of God, and in whose splendor all peoples will walk (cf. Rev. 21:23 ff.).

Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?

2. Throughout history even to the present day, there is found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. At times there is present even a recognition of a supreme being, or still more of a Father. This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense. The religions which are found in more advanced civilizations endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact language to answer these questions. Thus, in Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which men can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help. So, too, other religions which are found throughout the world attempt in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is

in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.

The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

3. The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,¹ who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and

Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.

4. Sounding the depths of the mystery which is the Church, this sacred Council remembers the spiritual ties which link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham.

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The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all Christ's faithful, who as men of faith are sons of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call and that the salvation of the Church is mystically pre-figured in the exodus of God's chosen people from the land of bondage. On this account the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established

the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rom. 11:17-24). The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself (cf. Eph. 2:14-16).

Likewise, the Church keeps ever before her mind the words of the apostle Paul about his kinsmen: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rom. 9:4-5), the son of the virgin Mary. She is mindful, moreover, that the apostles, the pillars on which the Church stands, are of Jewish descent, as are many of those early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world.

As holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize God's moment when it came (cf. Lk. 19:42). Jews for the most part did not accept the Gospel; on the contrary, many opposed the spreading of it (cf. Rom. 11:28). Even so, the apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.² Together with the prophets and that same apostle, the Church awaits the day, known to God

alone, when all peoples will call on God with one voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9; cf. Is. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11-32).

Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be obtained, especially, by way of biblical and theological enquiry and through friendly discussions.

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. John 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the Church is the

new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from the holy Scriptures. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the Word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ.



Two leaders from France, Cardinal Lustiger and Rabbi Sirat, speak with hope and confidence about the future of Jewish-Christian relations at the 1998 *Nostra Aetate* Awards ceremony and lecture.

Indeed, the Church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplors all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.^b

The Church always held and continues to hold that Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation. It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.

5. We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image. Man's relation to God the Father and man's relation to his fellow-men are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says "he who does not love, does not know God" (1 Jn. 4:8).

There is no basis therefore, either in theory or in practice for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people and people arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it.

Therefore, the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to "conduct themselves well among the Gentiles" (1 Pet. 2:12)

and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rom. 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt. 5:45).

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Nostra Aetate [Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions]. (1965). In A. Flannery (Ed.), *Vatican council II: The conciliar and post conciliar documents* (pp. 738-742). Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources.

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Notes

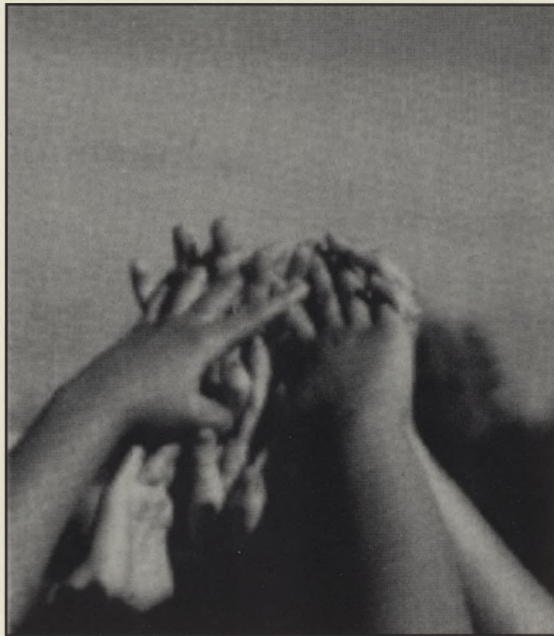
a) Translated by Father Killian, O.C.S.O.

1) Cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter 21 to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauretania (PL 148, col. 450 ff.).

2) Cf. Rom. 11:28-29; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (AAS 57, 1965, 20).

b) See D. 57.

UNDERSTANDING...



WITHIN OUR REACH.

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