

A JEWISH REACTION TO THE "NOTES"

by GEOFFREY WIGODER

I

The declaration *Nostra Aetate*,¹ issued in 1965, has proven a historic turning-point, ushering in a new era in which even the language used by the Church about Jews and Judaism differs from the traditional terminology. The pronouncement that the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God opened fresh vistas. Moreover, *Nostra Aetate* created its own dynamism, which has been expressed in such welcome manifestations as the cessation of mission to the Jews, the condemnation of anti-semitism and the adoption of positive steps to combat its expression — including liturgical and catechetical revision — as well as the development of Catholic-Jewish understanding on many levels.

The momentum was carried further by the Vatican with the creation of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and in the publication of the

Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder is active in inter-religious dialogue on both the Israeli and international scenes, serving as Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Israel Interfaith Committee and Israel Delegate to the International Jewish Committee on Inter-Religious Consultations. He also serves as Director of the Oral History Division of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University and as Editor of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. The present paper was presented at the meeting of the International Jewish-Catholic Liaison Committee held at Rome in October 1985 in connection with the observances of the twentieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*.

1. *Nostra Aetate; Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, issued by Second Vatican Council, 28 October 1965. Published (with earlier drafts) in A. Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews* (New York, 1968), pp. 271-279.

Guidelines in 1974.² The latter took its cues from *Nostra Aetate*, which it developed in various positive directions. Christians were told that they must strive to learn essential traits by which the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience; real dialogue was to take place of the previous monologue; Christians were asked to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul, “rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of the divine transcendence when faced with the mystery of the incarnate word.” The section of the *Guidelines* on teaching and education formed the starting point for the *Notes*, published in 1985.³

Among the expressions of the gathering momentum since *Nostra Aetate* have been a number of statements from Catholic spokesmen, led by the Pope, imbued with deep understanding for the Jewish people and Judaism. For example, the Pope, addressing representatives of the German Jewish community in Mainz in 1980, spoke of the depth and richness of our common inheritance, which brings us together in mutually trustful collaboration.⁴ He described Judaism as a *living* legacy that must be understood by Christians, and of a dialogue between today’s churches and today’s people of the Mosaic covenant. This notable speech evoked a detailed interpretation by Archbishop John Roach, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States, who discerned that the Pope had pointed to three dimensions of dialogue. The first flows from the past, from our common origins and the roots of Christianity in Judaism. The Pope’s remarks that the Old Covenant was never retracted by God, said Archbishop Roach, opens the way for an entirely new relationship between two *living* traditions on the basis of mutual respect for each other’s essential religious claims. The second dimension is the encounter in the present between the churches and today’s people of the Mosaic covenant – i.e., the Pope insisted on the Church’s acceptance of the continuing and permanent election of the Jewish people. Such a notion, said the Archbishop, calls for Christian appreciation of Judaism’s own self-definition and an awareness that the Church has a very real stake in the survival and prosperity of the Jewish people today. This second dimension was termed by the Pope “a reciprocal learning process.” The third dimension is future-oriented and involves working jointly for peace and justice. Such joint social action is not merely a secular enterprise but a properly religious one. Archbishop Roach adds that we share the longing for the kingdom of God whose vision we share. In the perspective of the kingdom, we can find a sense of common witness – a witness to the world by Jews and Christians together.

2. *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration, Nostra Aetate*, N. 4, Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, January 1975. Published in *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Sept. 1985), pp. 49-54.

3. *The Common Bond: Christians and Jews; Notes for Preaching and Teaching*, Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, in *ibid.*, pp. 55-66.

4. *L’Osservatore Romano* (English edition), December 9, 1980.

In his 1982 address to experts in Christian-Jewish relations,⁵ the Pope stated that the links between the Church and the Jewish people are grounded in the design of the God of the covenant. The terrible persecutions suffered by the Jews in various periods of history have opened many eyes and disturbed many hearts. He called for Jews and Christians to hold more in-depth exchanges based on their own identities, without allowing either one side or the other to be obscured. It is necessary, he said, to reach the point where religious instruction and catechesis will not only present Jews and Judaism in an honest and objective manner, but will do so without any prejudice or offence to anyone and, even more, with a lively awareness of the common heritage. We shall be able, said the Pope, to go by diverse, but in the end convergent, paths with the help of the Lord who has never ceased living with his people, to reach true brotherhood in reconciliation, respect and full accomplishment of God's plan in history.

I am quoting these statements at length, as they should be seen as the background against which certain Jewish circles anticipated the *Notes*. I also would like to quote other distinguished Church authorities who have taken a particular interest in relations with the Jews. Addressing the International Council of Christians and Jews last year, Cardinal Martini of Milan said:

Today, it is still not clear how the Church's mission and that of the Jewish people can enrich and integrate one another without neglecting the essential, unrelinquishable features of their own existence. But there is a final objective when we shall all be one people whom the Lord of hosts shall bless... There is a second aspect... both Jews and Christians carry out the service towards the rest of mankind. In fact, through Jews and Christians, God the Father of all continues to address each individual. The Jewish people as a whole, and each individual Jew considers himself as the first-born son of the Father, called upon to praise him. According to the New Testament, the Church is the messianic people at the service of the covenant between God and man, God and mankind, God and the universe. But, as can be seen in both cases, there is a common service to the same project of alliance. This service constitutes a priestly ministry, a mission that can unite us without confusing us with one another until the Messiah will come.⁶

Speaking in Marseilles in 1981, Cardinal Etchegaray stated:

As soon as Jews and Christians begin to examine together their contrary relations throughout history, is it not possible that they will discover themselves in God's plan as two forms of the single People of God, as the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig thought? There must be no question, certainly, of either Jews or Christians betraying their own identity. But while theology fails to respond firmly and clearly to the question of the permanent vocation of the Jewish people, the dialogue between Jews and Christians will remain at a superficial level, beset by mental restrictions... We must search for a relationship which goes beyond amity, and which reflects our mutual kinship.⁷

5. *Origins*, National Catholic Documentary Service, March 25, 1982.

6. Carlo Mano Cardinal Martini, "The Task of the Third Millennium," *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Dec. 1984), p. 9.

7. Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, "Towards a New Initiative in Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Sept. 1981), p. 6.

Pursuing this theme at the Synod in Rome in 1983, Cardinal Etchegaray said, "As in the parable, neither of the two sons can gain possession of the entire inheritance, each one is for the other, without jealousy, a witness to the gratuitousness of the Father's mercy."⁸

Such statements have been echoed in declarations by various church bodies. Bishops' conferences in various countries have elaborated the themes of the *Guidelines* and made serious contributions to the development of Catholic-Jewish understanding. To take just one example, the document issued last year by the Brazilian bishops⁹ stresses the need for Catholics to learn the essential traits by which the Jews define themselves, namely, the religious and ethnic elements. Judaism must not be equated with other religions, because through it monotheism entered human history. God himself constituted the Hebrews as a people after making a covenant with them. Judaism must not be considered as a leftover from a past which no longer exists, but the vitality of the Jewish people down to the present must be considered. All forms of anti-Semitism must be condemned and unfavorable judgments with regard to the Jews must be avoided. One may not make contrasts between Judaism and Christianity, such as that Judaism is a religion of fear and Christianity of love. God gave the ancient land of Canaan to Abraham, so that the rights of the Jews to a calm political existence in their country of origin, the State of Israel, must be acknowledged, without letting this create injustice or violence for other peoples.

II

I would next like to mention the examination by Catholic experts of the existing teaching tools in Catholic education with reference to the Jews and Judaism, as well as their recommendations. These are very relevant in that they are intended as a frame of reference for all those called upon to talk about Jews and Judaism in the course of teaching. I refer in this connection to three studies, all written by Catholics deeply involved in the promotion of Catholic-Jewish understanding.¹⁰ As all three studies point in the same direction, I shall mention the general lines of the consensus. The problems raised are those which the *Notes* are designed to answer and they will help to give us a criterion against which to assess the *Notes*.

8. *idem.*, "Reconciliation and Penitence," *Christian-Jewish Relations* Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 1983), p. 23.

9. H. Croner, ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York, 1985), pp. 151-153.

10. John T. Pawlikowski, *Catechetics and Prejudice* (New York, 1973), which is largely based on a study of Catholic textbooks in the US published shortly before the Vatican Council, but with conclusions of continuing relevance; Claire Huchet Bishop, *How Catholics look at Jews* (New York, 1974), an examination of Italian, Spanish and French teaching materials that appeared up to the mid-1960s; Eugene Fisher, *Seminary Education and Christian-Jewish Relations; A Curriculum and Resource Handbook* (Washington, D.C., 1983).

First of all, it must be recorded that many of the grosser attitudes have already been eliminated from textbooks following the Vatican Council and certain positive changes are to be noted, especially on the subject of deicide. However, there are cases in which Jews remain typical examples of nonbelievers, of bad faith – examples not to be followed, a foil contrasted with Christian attitudes. The positive aspects of Judaism are seen as culminating in Christianity, while Judaism's value as a religion is described as exhausted in its contribution to the Christian heritage. Although some improvement of the “fossilization” view of Judaism is noted after the Vatican Council, there remains the widespread idea that, by the time of Jesus, Judaism was merely a legalistic observance, while often no continuity is perceived between Judaism and Christianity. “The Jews are the world's saddest people because they turned away from Jesus” is one textbook quote.¹¹

Bringing their recommendations, the experts stress the importance of teaching the Old Testament, the nature of Judaism and the events of Jewish history in their own right. Mme. Bishop says that this must be done “without the traditional tag that this prefigures such and such a New Testament event,”¹² while Fisher warns that the typological or christological approach can result in the loss of the sense of the original meaning of the text as God's word to the Jewish people in a particular time and place, as well as the sense of its own grounds as the living word of God addressing us directly today.

Most negative references in the textbooks were concerned with the rejection of Jesus and the Divine curse, the events of the Passion, and the attitude of the Pharisees. As the experts point out, the problem with a Christianity which sees itself as the new Israel, the new Moses, the new covenant and the New Testament, leaves little if any room for understanding the continuity of Judaism and of so-called “old Israel's” relevance in the post-biblical world.

Fisher stresses the need to affirm the value of the *whole* Bible; to stress the profound Jewishness of Jesus and his teaching; to develop the ability to use Jewish sources; to avoid making parts of the Bible antithetical to one another; to teach the links between the Christian and the Jewish liturgies; and to stress the continuity of Christianity with the earlier covenant.¹³ Among other points raised is the need to teach other sources for understanding the Pharisees and to make it clear that the Jews' loss of their homeland and their dispersion was not a punishment for rejecting or killing Jesus. It is misleading, in one view quoted, to speak of the new covenant as supplanting the old: all mankind should be seen as part of a universal covenant, of which Sinai and Calvary are specifications. Another recommendation is that the Gospel be taught, not as eye-witness accounts, but as reflecting the times in which

11. Pawlikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

12. Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

13. Fischer, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

they were written as much as the time of Jesus. The New Testament, it is said, should be seen not as a single book but as various theologies, and theological speculations of the patristic age were often projected back into the New Testament text itself. While such teaching would have various implications, it is of specific concern here for the image of the Jews.

Moving on to later periods, there is unanimity concerning two serious gaps in Christian catechesis on the Jews: the virtual ignoring of post-Biblical Judaism and the need to teach the development of anti-Semitism, especially its Christian aspects. Catholic students, we are told, are deprived of meaningful exposure to post-Biblical Judaism. This fosters an attitude in which Judaism is seen as anachronistic while the student is unprepared for his encounter with the contemporary Jew. Present-day Judaism, it is said, has its own role and mission. The destiny of Judaism must be seen, not as simply to disappear and give way to Christianity, but as continuing to exercise a positive role in God's plan for salvation. This necessitates a knowledge of post-Biblical Judaism and of the history of the Jewish people and an understanding of the Jewish people today – with all their beliefs, problems, hopes and aspirations. It is, says one of the studies,¹⁴ an obligation for the Christian teacher to clarify to his students the continuing validity of Judaism as a religion, its important contributions and to disprove stereotypes. But, we are warned, it must take time to work out the interrelationship as two faith communities, as Christianity has defined itself for so long as the culmination of Judaism. Or, to quote another study, “We should learn about Jewish traditions, the home, holy days and festivals, we should know the distinctive combination of the particular and universal in Judaism, and learn to respect Judaism as a legitimate living religion.”¹⁵

Few seminaries, writes Fisher, have courses in post-Biblical Jewish literature, and even less on Christian anti-Semitism. We are told that most Christians are completely unaware of the long history of the persecution of the Jews, so frequently justified in the past by Christian pretexts. Textbooks, says Mme. Bishop, must come to grips with the Inquisition, and with expulsion, crusades, massacres, ritual murder, etc., with particular attention to the Holocaust, on which there is virtual silence and certainly no awareness of any Christian responsibility. It must be clearly taught that traditional anti-Semitism as propagated by the Church was an important reason for Christian indifference to the fate of the Jews. Father Flannery is quoted as saying that:

Christians are all but ignorant of the history of anti-Semitism which is not in their history books. Histories of the Middle Ages – and even of the Crusades – can be found in which the word “Jew” does not appear. There are Catholic dictionaries and encyclopedias in which the term “anti-Semitism” is not listed. The pages Jews have memorized have been torn from our history of the Christian era.¹⁶

14. Pawlikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

15. Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

16. Pawlikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Finally, it is suggested that Zionism and Israel are ignored because they upset the proof-by-punishment theory. These developments must be recognized as part of the understanding of the Jew today and of Israel's elementary right to exist. In the words of Father Pawlikowski, "If Christians are to take seriously the directions set by the Vatican Guidelines, they must grapple with the two fundamental realities in present-day Jewish consciousness – the Holocaust and Israel."¹⁷ Here then are the points made by Catholic experts making their recommendations as to revision in catechesis.

III

Turning now to a consideration of the *Notes*, I would like to relate first to those issues where Jewish reaction is entirely or largely positive. I have heard the criticism that, in some of our published reactions, our negative comments have been disproportionate to our recognition of the positive innovations (which is perhaps natural, as assent and agreement can be conveyed in a few words, whereas dissent requires lengthy explanation), so let me begin with a word of deep appreciation for what has been accomplished. This document, so painstakingly drafted, is another step in the dynamic process already mentioned of constituting a new era of relations between Jews and Catholics. In many ways it is a major contribution in that direction, and we are deeply mindful of its sincerity and its lofty objectives.

Let me start by singling out two noteworthy statements. The first is the affirmation of what the *Notes* call "the remarkable theological formula" of the Pope saying in Mainz: "The people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked." The incorporation of this statement in an official Vatican document constitutes an important step forward, whose full implications remain to be explored. It was not to be expected that *Notes for Preaching and Catechesis* would be the framework for such an exploration, but certain questions raised by the text of the *Notes*, which I will mention, already indicate the need for a theological consideration of the implications of that statement. A further courageous statement with profound implications is the warning of the care to be taken in reading certain New Testament texts. I refer to section IV, 21A: "It cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less favourable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus. To establish this is of capital importance if we wish to bring out the meaning of certain Gospel texts for the Christians today." This attitude is the result of modern New Testament scholarship, and its expression in a Vatican document is a tribute to the openness of the Church on these matters. The application of this recommendation

17. Pawlikowski, "The Evolution of Christian-Jewish Dialogue," *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (December 1984), p. 23.

could lead to the elimination of the sources of many historical frictions between Catholic and Jew.

Paragraph 11 of Section 2, both in its content and its wording, is an outstanding expression of our new relationship, which we wholeheartedly endorse:

Attentive to the same God who has spoken, hanging on the same word, we have to witness to one same memory and one common hope in Him who is master of history. We must also accept our responsibility to prepare the world for the coming of the Messiah by working together for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation. To this we are driven, Jews and Christians, by the command to love our neighbour, by a common hope for the Kingdom of God and by the great heritage of the Prophets. Transmitted soon enough by catechesis, such a conception would teach young Christians in a practical way to cooperate with Jews, going beyond simple dialogue.

The sections covering the New Testament period – the Jewish roots of Christianity and Jews in the New Testament – are written with deep understanding. They relate to many of the problems in traditional New Testament interpretation which have been pinpointed by the above-mentioned examinations of Catholic textbooks, and lay down clear guidelines for the study and teaching of the text in a manner designed to eliminate expositions likely to lead to anti-Jewish prejudice. The Jewishness of Jesus is emphasized with sympathetic insight, while the much-maligned Pharisees receive a long-overdue rehabilitation. All these constitute historic advances. Similarly, the expansion of the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* and the *Guidelines* on the subject of deicide and the condemnation of anti-Semitism are major contributions, although in these contexts there are certain reservations which I will mention shortly. It is encouraging to read the specific citation from the catechism of the Council of Trent.¹⁸ Its rejection of prejudice and its universalistic conclusion were outstanding for a medieval document of any faith, and it is to be regretted that it appears to have had no practical impact. How much suffering could have been avoided had it been heeded then and how modern it sounds five centuries later.

Also welcome is the teaching that Judaism is a contemporary, and not only a historical, reality and the reference to the continuing fecundity of the Jews down

18. The Council of Trent (1545-63) laid down:

In this guilt (i.e., the Crucifixion) are involved all those who fall frequently into sin; for, as our sins consigned Christ the Lord to the death of the cross, most certainly those who wallow in sin and iniquity *crucify to themselves again the son of God, as far as in them lies, and make a mockery of him*. This guilt seems more enormous in us than in the Jews since according to the testimony of the same apostle: *If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory*; while we, on the contrary, professing to know him, yet denying him by our actions, seem in some sort to lay violent hands on him. (Heb. 6:6; I Cor. 2:8)

See E. Fischer, *Faith Without Prejudice; Rebuilding Christian Attitudes towards Judaism* (New York, 1977), p. 76.

the ages, which refutes the former view of Judaism as fossilised and ossified. These are all major positive contributions.

IV

Let me now discuss some of the issues that are troubling us. The basic problem is the nature of salvation. At its very outset, the document lays down that Church and Judaism cannot be seen as two parallel ways of salvation and that the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all. Although this is qualified by strict respect for religious liberty, its implications are clear, not only for Judaism, but for all other faiths, which are allowed existential but not theological legitimacy. The Church alone has the Truth and is the sole path of Salvation for all mankind (I,7). "Outside the Church there is no salvation" is a doctrine proclaimed by the church Fathers, a teaching which has moulded traditional Catholic attitudes to Jews with all their negative aspects. We realise that we are dealing with a basic tenet of Catholicism on which no compromise can be expected. But we had hoped for new insights and understandings, without sacrificing the fundamentals. The statements by Church leaders quoted earlier pointed in such a direction. When the Pope, addressing the Catholic experts on Judaism in 1982, stated,¹⁹ "We shall be able to go by diverse but in the end convergent paths and with the help of the Lord, who has never ceased loving His people, to reach true brotherhood in reconciliation, respect and the full accomplishment of God's plan in history," we had hoped that this endorsed the legitimacy of divergence and the mystery of convergence. Instead, we are told that divergence must be understood as temporary and that convergence is a precondition to salvation. This is not what we had anticipated from Archbishop Roach's explanation that the Pope's statement opened up the way for an entirely new relationship between two living religions on the basis of mutual respect for each other's religious claims.

Thus, already at the outset of the document the deepest level of Jewish self-understanding is negated and Jews are denied their own validity. The *Notes*, which so admirably seek to correct historical distortions, perpetuate theological prejudice. Of course, every faith holds that it has the right way. Judaism, so often accused of particularism, teaches that the Righteous of all Nations have their place in the World to come – i.e., that salvation comes through righteous living. It lays down a minimal universal standard of righteousness for this, with special demands applying to Jews by virtue of the Divine covenant. The Church sees salvation in faith in Jesus, and unless it is prepared to interpret this for other faiths in terms of mystery and eschatology, a keynote of triumphalism will be inevitable. Where does this leave dialogue? Where does this leave Cardinal Etchegaray's affirmation that "So long as theology fails to respond firmly and clearly to the question of the permanent vocation of the Jewish people, the dialogue between Jews and Christians

19. *Op. cit.* (note 5).

will remain at a superficial level, beset by mental restrictions”? Where is the theological space for Jewish self-understanding expected by Jews and stressed by the Catholic experts as an essential of catechesis? And how does this square with the *Notes*’ own statement that a fundamental condition of dialogue is the respect for the essential traits by which the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience? And, while one of the most positive consequences of *Nostra Aetate* has been the discontinuation of mission to the Jews, does not this attitude indicate a conversionist hope, to be interpreted by every Catholic implicitly if not explicitly and leave Jews uncomfortable and uncertain of the motives of their dialogue partner? To quote from Eugene Fisher’s book:

The point, it need always be remembered, is not who is “most dear” to God. In the Christian vision, we acknowledge that both the church and Jewish people stand in covenant relationship with the Creator. The point, rather, is what God has called us both, Jews and Christians, to do in and for the world. The issue is the building of God’s Kingdom, not what place either of us feel we can claim within that Kingdom.²⁰

Linked to the concept of salvation is the validity of the Election. The faithful, we are told, should learn to appreciate and love the Jews who remain a chosen people. But chosen for what? — “To prepare the coming of Christ. They have preserved everything that was progressively revealed and given in the course of that preparation, notwithstanding their difficulty in recognizing in him their messiah.”²¹ Similarly, we are told that the definitive meaning of the election of Israel does not become clear except in the light of the complete fulfilment. In light of these premises, what can the teacher and preacher convey of the nature of Jewish self-understanding or of the validity of post-Biblical Judaism? How does this fundamentally differ from the traditional teaching and preaching concerning Jews and their role in the Divine economy? The Jews of course see their election in completely different terms, with an ongoing relevance both for themselves and for the world at large. Is there no room in contemporary catechesis to at least acquaint Catholics with the Jewish concept so as to provide some insight into the mystery of Jewish survival?

Herein lies one of the basic ambiguities of the document. “The people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked” is its initial premise. This would seem at least to affirm the existence of two covenants, valid side by side. Is the first covenant still valid in its totality? If the Jews were chosen to prepare the coming of Christ, what is their role after his coming? Have they an independent existence within their own view of their covenant, or do they remain here solely to somehow give potential witness to Christ and to the Parousia?

We have similar problems regarding other aspects of the *Notes*. On the relation between the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, we are told that the

20. Fischer, *Seminary Education*, p. 16.

21. *Op. cit.* (note 3).

Hebrew Bible have permanent values – for the expression of Christian faith. Have its proclamation of monotheism, the glory of the Psalms, the social and ethical message of the Prophets, no permanent value in their own rights? Is it not a great universal document for all mankind? This is not stated. Instead, we receive a consideration of typology which, we are told, makes many people uneasy and is the sign of an unresolved problem. However, it is nevertheless in effect endorsed, which means that – although a caveat is entered against any rupture between the two testaments – the Old Testament is not to be read for itself, but as a forecast and prefiguration of the New Testament which provides the *sensus plenior*. The document endeavours to tread warily around this issue and does indeed state that Christians can profit discerningly from the traditions of Jewish reading. However, according to the typological approach, we as Jews lose any intrinsic value and do not stand on our own, but become mere models and prototypes. Jesus is the point of reference for the Old Testament, which likewise does not stand on its own. We are told that the Exodus, for example, represents an incomplete experience of salvation and liberation. Could one not at least draw the distinction that the Jews do indeed see the Exodus as an experience of salvation and liberation complete in itself, while for Christians it provides the “type” for a later “antitype”? The use of typology has constituted a major obstacle for Jews throughout the history of the Church, and the apparent reaffirmation of typology as legitimate exegesis is disquieting. Is typology to be seen as the sole theological approach to the Hebrew Bible? Until now typological readings have inevitably borne negative consequences for Jews and Judaism. The meaning of the covenant between God and Israel is seen only as becoming clear with the coming of Jesus, while the historical events, personalities and institutions of the Old Testament are only “types” of events, personalities and institutions of the New. In Eugene Fischer’s book quoted earlier, he warns that the typological approach can result in the loss of the sense of the original meaning of the text as God’s word to the Jewish people and of its value in its own right.²²

Not long ago, I read a citation from a recent work by Cardinal Ratzinger. “We must again have the courage,” it stated “to say clearly that the Bible, taken as a whole, is Catholic.”^{22a} I was reminded of a memoir I read of a Catholic boyhood in Dublin early in the century in which the author says: “We were taught to regard the Old Testament as a Protestant document, having no bearing on our faith.”²³ We Jews find such an approach out of keeping with the spirit of our new relationship. The Hebrew Bible is Jewish, albeit with deep significance for others, and for us this recognition is axiomatic.

On the subject of the death of Jesus, the *Notes* quote the pioneering path laid down by *Nostra Aetate* and the *Guidelines*. While I have certain reservations regarding the

22. Fischer, *Seminary Education*, p. 21.

22a. See *The Tablet*, 7 September 1985, editorial.

23. C.S. Andrews, *Dublin Made Me* (Dublin, 1979), p. 120.

interpretations contained in these documents, as well as the *Notes*' conclusion blaming "the authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead" for the death of Christ, I do not propose here to enter into the historical argument. This is one of those subjects calling for an application of the recommendation to examine the impact of later controversies on the text. Today, the crucial fact is that the church has, over the past twenty years, seriously combatted the deicide charge with its broad and tragic implications. However, the *Notes* do make one addition that has unfortunate implications. It is stated in the *Notes* that "there is no putting the Jews who knew Jesus and did not believe in him or those who opposed the preaching of the apostles on the same plane with Jews who came after or those of today. If the responsibility of the former remains a mystery, the latter are in an entirely different situation." This is a sincere attempt to move away from the historical construction built by the Church by which the Jews of Jesus' time were blamed for his death and all succeeding generations suffered accordingly, but in attempting to alter the structure, an injustice has been done to the Jewish people. We contemporary Jews do not accept the differentiation from our ancestors in the first century; continuity is fundamental to our self-conception. Tractate *Avot* teaches the continuity of tradition from Moses to Mishnaic times, and the continuity of this tradition throughout all generations to this day is implicit to us. We are the same Jews as the Jews in the time of Jesus. Indeed, we particularly identify with the Jews of that era. The basis of rabbinic Judaism, the Mishnah, was then being laid and the strength of the Pharisaic tradition enabled us to withstand the loss of our Temple, sovereignty and independence and to construct, thanks to the activity of the Sanhedrin, the Judaism that has sustained us for almost 2000 years. Therefore, we are not in an entirely different situation from these Jews and, it must be added, the Jewish people then, down the ages, and today have remained consistent in their attitude to Jesus. In this respect, in postulating an apparent distinction between our ancestors and ourselves the document does a disservice.

V

We now turn to the last section of the document, "Judaism and Christianity in History." Here again there are statements that are helpful: the permanence of Israel is an historic fact; Israel remains a chosen people, with a continuous spiritual fecundity down to modern times; anti-Semitism is forthrightly condemned. We regret certain omissions – notably, 2000 years of Jewish history, not referred to, and the Christian record of anti-Semitism, which is left to be inferred from the terse statement that the balance of relations between Jews and Christians over 2000 years has been negative. *Nostra Aetate* is quoted as the source for condemning anti-Semitism "at any time and from any source," but we would have wished that the issue had been presented more explicitly, because we feel it important for the lessons of the consequences that have transpired when hatred of Jews has been inspired by a religious source be learned.

Cardinal Martini, in his address last year to the International Council of Christians and Jews, said:

Everyday for us [is] the moment to start by asking God and our brothers, in this case the Jews, to accept our suffering for the wrong we have done, and for the good that we have forgotten to do. Let us go back to God and to man, his image. Let us bend over this Jewish brother, over the history of his suffering, martyrdom, persecutions. Let us remove tendentious, or injurious interpretations of passages contained in the New Testament and in other writings. Let us dissipate the misunderstandings that still make us diffident of reciprocal good will.²⁴

Cardinal Willebrands, in his historic lecture earlier this year to the Oxford Union, concluded "Christianity and anti-Semitism are intrinsically incompatible. Anti-Semitism is anti-Christian."²⁵ How pungent and meaningful a formulation and how helpful it would have been for catechesis. Related to this is our disappointment at the almost offhand reference in the *Notes* to the Holocaust. "Catachesis should help in understanding the meaning for the Jews of the extermination during the years 1939-45 and its consequences." Just how much will this convey to teachers and preachers of this traumatic event, which has seared every Jewish soul and which underlies whatever we have done or said over the past forty years? Moreover, is the Holocaust to be understood only for its meaning for the Jews? Is not the entire development of our relationship, beginning with *Nostra Aetate*, an outcome of the meaning of the Holocaust for the Church? Indeed, has not the Holocaust universal implications and message? As understood by Pope John XXIII, Cardinal Bea and other leaders, the meaning of the Holocaust to Christians has been recognized by the Church. Surely such recognition deserves explicit reflection in the *Notes* so as to be passed on to the wide community of the faithful.

The second traumatic event in recent Jewish history has been the establishment of the State of Israel, which is today also deeply etched into the consciousness of every Jew, an inescapable fact for the understanding of the Jew today. Indeed, the *Notes* do contain an element of progress in that direction. The subject was after all completely ignored in *Nostra Aetate* and the *Guidelines*, and the *Notes* have had the courage to cross the Rubicon and not only acknowledge the Jews "preserving memories of their land," but also make a specific reference to the State of Israel. Some forward steps have been taken, but we are still left with basic reservations. I would distinguish here between the Jewish attachment to Zion and the actual State of Israel. On the former issue, I would like to express my reaction in a question. We are constantly being reminded of St. Paul's comment in Romans 11:29 that the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable; we have mentioned the Pope's statement, enshrined in the *Notes*, that the Old Covenant has never been revoked. Are we speaking today of one covenant or two? Does the second covenant incorporate and continue the first covenant or does it annul the first covenant? If the first covenant

24. *Op. cit.* (note 6), p. 6.

25. Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, "Vatican II and the Jews: Twenty Years Later," *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (March 1985), p. 20.

is annulled, we know where we stand – back in the Middle Ages. But if the Old Covenant has never been revoked, does not this mean that it retains its validity as a whole? If so, in the words of the *London Times*' editorial on the *Notes*, "If the concept of the 'Chosen People' is still valid in Catholic teaching, why not also the concept of the 'Promised Land'?"²⁶ The *Notes* invite the faithful to understand Jewish religious attachment "without however making their own any particular religious interpretation of this relationship." Statements have been made – even by ardent supporters of our relationship – warning Catholics that for them the Jewish attachment to the Land has no religious significance.

But the Divine promise of the Land to the patriarchs is a major element of the Covenant. If the first covenant is not annulled, do not *all* its clauses retain their religious validity? The *Notes* reject the concept of a people punished, so that the exile of the Jews is not to be theologically interpreted. So how do we come to lose the Promised Land?

Referring to the State of Israel, the *Notes* say, "The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged, not in a perspective which is itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law." One wonders what the public of preachers and teachers for whom this document is intended will derive from this formulation. They will understand that their religious views must not colour their attitude, but what will they make of the reference to international law? Will they remember that the State was established by a decision of the United Nations, or that the Holy See has refused to establish diplomatic relations? Indeed, if the State is to be seen in the perspective of international law – without theological obstacles – what justification is there to withhold diplomatic recognition? Our suspicion is that the public may be confused, not discerning any real positive message. In face of the continuing attempts to delegitimize the State of Israel and the continuing threats to its existence, the least to be hoped for by the Church was the acknowledgement of the right of the Jews to their own State. Cardinal Willebrands formulated it movingly in his recent statement in London:

...Jewish sensibilities should be respected and cared for, although they may not enter into our normal perspectives. I shall name only two: the recent history of Jewish suffering under Nazi persecution, and the Jews' commitment to and concern for the land of Israel; this concern is political or secular but also, for many, religious. It belongs, I believe, to an exercise of Christian charity towards one's own brother, with whom we are seeking reconciliation for offences which are very real, not to gloss over this dimension. To carry the memory of many millions deaths is a terrible burden; to have a place under the sun where to live in peace and security, with due respect for the rights of others, is a form of hope. Here we have two important points of reference in the Catholics' day-to-day relation to Jew.²⁷

And to again quote from the words of Cardinal Martini:

26. "The Old Covenant and the New," editorial, *London Times*, July 1, 1985.
27. *Op. cit.* (note 25), p. 27.

Out of the tragedy [of the Holocaust], hope shines again and again on the path of the Jewish people through history. And hope re-emerges from the horror of the Holocaust and there is a concrete sign of hope that shines like a light in the night: it is the messianic promise of the land, of a reconciled land of Jerusalem, the city of peace, of a future world of a messianic *Shalom*.²⁸

And, especially the words of the Pope speaking on Easter 1984:

For the Jewish people who live in the State of Israel and who preserve in that land such precious testimonies to their history and their faith, we must ask for the desired security and the due tranquility that is the prerogative of every nation and condition of life and of progress for every society.²⁹

In the wake of such words, the wording of the *Notes* proved highly disappointing, lacking the understanding, sympathy and soul of these statements.

For all its affirmation of Judaism and the Jewish people as a “living reality,” one might have expected more indications concerning the knowledge of Judaism, its moral message and the living Jewish people in the world today. The *Notes* refer to the painful ignorance of Jewish history and tradition but, we are told, “the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church.” Again, the implication is that they have no value in themselves, but only within the framework of the life of the Church. One had hoped for recommendations closer to those of the Catholic experts quoted earlier: the study in seminars and schools of post-Biblical Judaism and Jewish history; the Jewish way of life, its festivals and liturgy (mentioned in the section on Liturgy, but not as a subject for active study and exploration); the very nature of Jewishness, with its multiple implications; just who are the Jewish people today. In some parts of the world, where Jews and Catholics live side-by-side, this is often being accomplished at the grass-roots level, and this deserves encouragement and expansion. But this document is intended for universal application, and the projection of the appropriate image of the contemporary Jew and Judaism should surely have been more specifically stressed. Many Christians never meet a Jew except through their catechism, the sermon, and the religious school. For such, the *Notes* can be of unique significance and can determine attitudes in large regions of the world.

VI

To summarize: our Catholic friends were, I believe, taken aback at the intensity of our reaction to the *Notes*. Here was a document intended to combat negative doctrines and stereotypes in order to foster further Catholic understanding of Judaism and the Jews. But in expounding what is often new ground in catechesis,

28. *Op. cit.* (note 6), p. 5

29. *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 20, 1984.

other traditional layers were uncovered or reiterated which, as I have described, have caused us concern. The Hebrew Bible is denied to us in its essence as incomplete in itself and to be read exclusively through Christian eyes. Our early history and traditions are appropriated as merely a preparation for the Church. Our post-Biblical religious development and history are largely ignored or, where acknowledged, seen for their implications for the Church rather than as having absolute value in themselves. There is an inadequate attempt to understand the Jewish people today in all its complexity, including its attachment to the State of Israel, which is not only religious, as the *Notes* acknowledge, but based on a variety of factors, not least of which has been the lesson of living as a persecuted minority for too long a time. Many basic aspects of Jewish self-understanding have gotten lost. And worst of all is what is, in effect, the denial of the autonomous validity of Judaism and the legitimacy of its eternal future. Recognition of legitimacy is not required or requested by the Jewish people: we have lived without them for almost two thousand years and we will continue to live without them. But in the spirit of the document, we feel that the continuing inculcation of traditional teachings in Catholic catechesis will only serve to perpetuate attitudes that have for so long proved derogatory.

Where does all this leave our dialogue? For Judaism, the very concept of theology is alien to its original modes of thought. Theology is not for us a discipline that can be isolated, but is inextricably bound up with halakha – the observance of the divinely-ordained way of life – and it may be in action-orientation that our dialogue holds the most promise. The late Israeli thinker, Uriel Tal, has suggested that the Catholic Church's renewed confrontation with earthliness has opened up common denominators with the Jewish concepts of Torah and halakha. Here, we can clearly delineate the areas where we can work together – in the words of the *Notes*, “for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations, and for social and international reconciliation.” Dialogue could also be employed fruitfully towards filling the lacunae of the *Notes* – the teaching of Jewish history, the lessons of Christian anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, the understanding of the nature of Judaism and the Jewish people today – and conversely, it should be added, for the better understanding among Jews of Christianity today.

On theological subjects, we seek understanding, not agreement. Further clarification is essential in order to reach deeper layers of understanding between us. Some of the statements quoted from Catholic sources may provide a hopeful positive direction. Much will also depend on how the *Notes* are interpreted – and here it is to be hoped that Father Duprey and Monsignor Mejia's comments³⁰ will become an integral addition. One also hopes that Eugene Fisher's paper³¹ will receive wider dissemination.

30. “A Note on the Preparation of the Document of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 25, 1985.

31. Eugene J. Fischer, “The Evolution of a Tradition: From *Nostra Aetate* to the ‘Notes,’” *Christian-Jewish Relations*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (December 1985), pp. 32-47.

We are two proud entities and we wish it to remain that way. It is our conviction that from our common belief in the Fatherhood of God stems our common belief in the Brotherhood of Man, and these give us shared objectives and a congruous platform. In its positive aspects, the *Notes* show ways towards those points where we can meet and those where we must stand together.

Immanuel 20 (Spring 1986)