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Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue

Edward H. Flannery

Institute of Judaean-Christian Studies

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GUIDELINES FOR CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS

The following directives constitute the official policy of The American Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Written by Fr. Edward H. Flannery, in conjunction with other members of the Committee, they were approved by the American Bishops' Conference and released on March 16, 1967.

PERSPECTIVES

IN ITS Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions of 1965, the Second Vatican Council issued a historic Statement on the Jews and summoned all Catholics to re-appraise their attitude toward, and relationship with, the Jewish people.

The Statement was, in effect, a culminating point of initiatives and pronouncements of recent pontiffs and of numerous endeavors in the Church concerned with Catholic-Jewish harmony. It was also the point of convergence of many insights opened by Pope Paul's Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* and the Council's Constitution on the Church and Decree on Ecumenism.

The call of the Council to a fraternal encounter with Jews may be seen, further, as one of the more important fruits of the spirit of renewal generated by the Council in its deliberations and decrees. Was it not indeed the Council's response to Pope John XXIII's famous words in which he embraced the Jewish people: "I am Joseph your brother" (Gen 45:4)?

More specifically, the Council's call is an acknowledgment of the conflicts and tensions that have separated Christians and Jews through the centuries and of the Church's determination, as far as possible, to eliminate them. Well does it serve both in word and action as a recognition of the manifold sufferings and injustices inflicted upon the Jewish people by Christians in our own times as well as in the past. The Statement speaks from the highest level of the Church's authority to serve notice that injustices directed against the Jews at

any time from any source can never receive Catholic sanction or support.

The message of the Council's Statement is clear. Recalling in moving terms the "spiritual bond that ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock," the Fathers of the Council remind us of the special place Jews hold in the Christian outlook, for "now as before, God holds them most dear, for the sake of the patriarchs; He has not withdrawn His gifts or calling." Jews, therefore, the Fathers caution, "are not to be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from Holy Scripture." The passion of Jesus, moreover, "cannot be attributed without distinction to all Jews then alive, nor can it be attributed to the Jews of today." The Church, the Statement declares, "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism staged against the Jews at whatever time in history and by whomsoever."

In light of these principles, the Fathers enjoin that "*all see to it* that nothing is taught, either in catechetical work or in the preaching of the Word of God, that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ."

Rather should Christians and Jews "further their mutual knowledge of, and respect for, one another, a knowledge and respect born primarily of biblical and theological studies, but also of fraternal dialogues."

Responding to the urgency of the conciliar Statement on the Jews, our American bishops have established, as part of their Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, a Sub-Commission for Catholic-Jewish Relations, with Bishop Francis P. Leipzig of Baker, Oregon, as chairman, Bishop Aloysius J. Wycislo of Chicago, Illinois, as vice-chairman, and Monsignor George Higgins as secretary. This Sub-Commission will devote itself exclusively to Catholic-Jewish affairs. The guidelines that follow, composed by the Sub-Commission, are designed to encourage and assist the various dioceses of the country in their efforts to put into action at all levels of the Church the Council's directives.

The Church in America is faced with a historic opportunity to advance the cause of Catholic-Jewish harmony throughout the world—an opportunity to continue the leadership taken in that direction by our American bishops during the great debate on the Statement at the Council. In the United States lives the largest Jewish community in the world. In the United States, a land that has welcomed im-

migrants and refugees from persecution, the Church has committed herself without reserve to the American ideal of equal opportunity and justice for all. In such a setting the Church in America today is providentially situated to distinguish itself in pursuit of the purposes of the Council's Statement.

It is our prayerful hope that the norms and recommendations of these guidelines will prove helpful to American Catholics in attaining this noble objective.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. It is recommended that in each diocese in which Jews and Christians live a commission or secretariat, or some member thereof, be assigned to Catholic-Jewish affairs.

2. In keeping with the spirit of the Council's Declaration on Ecumenism, Catholics should take the initiative not only in Catholic-Protestant and Orthodox affairs, but also in fostering Catholic-Jewish understanding. Public and formal projects, however, should have the approval of the Ordinary of the diocese.

3. The general aim of all Catholic-Jewish meetings is to increase our understanding both of Judaism and of the Catholic faith, eliminate sources of tension and misunderstanding, initiate dialogues or conversations on different levels, multiply intergroup meetings between Catholics and Jews, and promote cooperative social action.

4. These meetings should be marked by a genuine respect for the person and freedom of all participants and a willingness to listen and to learn from the other party. They should be jointly planned and developed.

5. In order to avoid possible apprehensions concerning the objectives of these meetings, their scope and confines should be mutually agreed upon in advance.

6. It is recommended that in order to maintain the dialogue on the highest possible level its organization be accomplished in consultation with those experienced in the structural, doctrinal, and interpersonal skills the dialogue requires.

7. It is understood that proselytizing is to be carefully avoided in the dialogue, the chief aim of which, as Cardinal Bea has pointed

out in his book *The Church and the Jewish People*, "is not specifically concerned with the differences between Christianity and other religions, that is to say, with the characteristic features of the former, but rather with the points which it has in common with other faiths."

8. Prayer in common with Jews should, whenever it is feasible, be encouraged, especially in matters of common concern, such as peace and the welfare of the community. Needless to say, such prayers should meet the spiritual sensibilities of both parties, finding their inspiration in our common faith in the one God.

RECOMMENDED PROGRAMS

1. CATHOLIC-JEWISH relations should be advanced on all levels; clerical and lay, academic and popular, religious and social.

2. A favored instrument is the dialogue, a form of group conversation in which competent participants discuss assigned topics or themes in openness, candor, and friendship. Those not well versed in inter-religious affairs run the risk of unwittingly offending by inaccurate portrayal of each other's doctrine or way of life.

3. Diocesan and parochial organizations, schools, colleges, universities, and especially seminaries should organize programs to implement the Statement.

4. The pulpit should also be used for expounding the teachings of the Statement and exhorting participation in programs fitted to the parochial level.

5. School texts, prayerbooks, and other media should, under competent auspices, be examined in order to remove not only those materials which do not accord with the content and spirit of the Statement, but also those which fail to show Judaism's role in salvation-history in any positive light.

6. It is recommended that Catholic-Jewish understanding be fostered effectively at the popular level by means of so-called "open houses" in places of worship, mutual visits to schools, joint social events, and "living room dialogues."

7. Catholic-Jewish cooperation in the field of social action designed to promote public welfare and morality should be encouraged.

8. Orientation and resource material for the foregoing recommenda-

tions may be sought from the various Catholic and Jewish organizations that have been active in the field of Christian-Jewish relations. It is also suggested that contact be made with Protestant agencies and leadership experts in this area of endeavor.

9. While popular "grassroots" programs to improve Catholic-Jewish relations must be pressed forward without delay, slower and deeper explorations of pertinent issues by Catholic and Jewish scholars must also be given a high priority. Since many of the problems in this area of Catholic-Jewish relations are intellectual in nature, research in history, psychology, sociology, and the Bible by individual Catholic and Jewish scholars as well as collaborative scholarly enterprises are to be highly commended.

10. The following themes which, among others, are viewed by Christian and Jewish dialogists as important issues affecting Christian-Jewish relations merit the attention and study of Catholic educators and scholars.

a. Scholarly studies and educational efforts to show the common historical, biblical, doctrinal, and liturgical heritage shared by Catholics and Jews, as well as the differences.

b. As the Statement requires, the presentation of the Crucifixion story in such a way as not to implicate all Jews of Jesus' time or of today in a collective guilt for the crime.

c. In keeping with the Statement's strong repudiation of anti-Semitism, a frank and honest treatment of the history of Christian anti-Semitism in our history books, courses, and curricula.

d. A study of the life of Jesus and of the primitive Church in the setting of the religious, social, and cultural features of Jewish life in the first century.

e. An explicit rejection of the historically inaccurate notion that Judaism of that time, especially that of Pharisaism, was a decadent formalism and hypocrisy, well exemplified by Jesus' enemies.

f. An acknowledgment by Catholic scholars of the living and complex reality of Judaism after Christ and the permanent election of Israel, alluded to by St. Paul (Rom 9:29), and incorporation of the results into Catholic teaching.

g. A full and precise explanation of the use of the expression "the Jews" by St. John and other New Testament references

which appear to place all Jews in a negative light. (These expressions and references should be fully and precisely clarified in accordance with the intent of the Statement that Jews are not to be "presented as rejected or accursed by God as if this followed from Holy Scripture.")

Editor's Note: Since these guidelines were published, the Sub-Commission mentioned on page 258 has been restructured and is now called The Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations. Bishop Francis J. Mugavero is its Episcopal Moderator and Fr. Flannery its Executive Secretary. While Bishop John J. Dougherty was President of Seton Hall University, the Secretariat was invited to enjoy the hospitality of its campus. The Secretariat's work is aided by a committee of advisors.