The Declaration: One Year Later

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THE DECLARATION: ONE YEAR LATER

This address was given by the Editor to the Edith Stein Guild in New York City on October 8, 1966.

ONE year ago, on October 28, 1965, the Vatican Council's Declaration on the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions with its vital Statement on the bond between the Church and the Jewish people was promulgated by Pope Paul. He did so, if I may paraphrase his words, with joy, joy in the Church's newness, joy in the amazing rejuvenation that sprang, springs, and will spring from this act of the Council, joy in her youthful features for all the world to see. No longer may the children of Israel be looked upon with scorn or distrust; distrust must give way to respect, scorn to love and hope.

The Council's Statement brought a tremendous blessing to the Church: it let her be her true self. If one remembers that for centuries Jews had to live under all sorts of restrictive laws, issued or sanctioned by the Church; that they were forced to listen to sermons on the Christian faith; that, at times, they were given the choice between baptism and expulsion from the country they lived in, one understands the Statement's significance: It crushed the serpent of triumphalism, that sorry temptation to lord it over others, that dreadful mistake which seeks to cast the Church in the role of a worldly power. Her mission, however, is not to dominate but to serve.

The conciliar Statement on the Jews—together with other documents of Vatican II—crushed the serpent of triumphalism which would have the Church anticipate the glory of Christ's return: she—and that means "we"—is not at her goal; she—this again means "we"—has not arrived at her destination; she is—we are—still on the way. Like the Israel of the desert, the Church is a community on pilgrimage.

When the Declaration was made public, there was in my opinion abundant cause for the ringing of bells. Easter bells should have pealed, singing their alleluia, for the Church had finally thrown off the fetters with which some of her own children had shackled her
heart when they chained the Jews to a false verdict of rejection by God and to a fate of oppression by men. Today she is alive to the words of Paul about his kinsmen: "Their is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is the Christ, according to the flesh" (Rom 9:4-5).

The Church is alive with wonder at these gifts of God, loving, free, and sovereign. She is alive, too, with that affection for the chosen people which filled the heart of Paul, the heart of the humble maiden of Nazareth and, supremely, the heart of Jesus. I wish the shofar, too, had been blown to hail this great event. I do not mean to imply that Jews should have given, or should now give, thanks to the Church. No man is required to be grateful for the truth another speaks of him or for justice he receives. After centuries of suffering, however, Jews ought to be glad before God at the message of the Council.

According to the law of jubilee, the ram's horn was to be sounded loud so as to usher in the year of release and to proclaim liberty. If an Israelite had been forced from his land, it was to be given back to him: The time had come for him to return to his holding and to his family (Lev 25:8-12). Did not something like this take place in Rome, a year ago? Was not, in the minds of Christians, the people of Israel given back a title that in reality it had never lost: Beloved of the Lord? Despite all the failings the Gospel recounts, "now as before, God holds Israel most dear for the sake of the patriarchs," for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God's chosen friends (Rom 11:28).

It is as if Israel inherited again and again what cannot be inherited: God's love, compassion, and mercy. But the real reason for Israel's continuing place near the heart of God is not a claim on her part, but God's everlasting fidelity. The God of Israel is a faithful God; He is steadfast, true, and worthy of trust.

Yet, on returning home from the Council, not to the joy of bells but to an outpouring of disapproval of the Declaration, even of abuse of the Council, I was disheartened, for a time. For all its undoubted imperfections, the conciliar Statement is, I have no doubt, a divine offer of grace to Christians, to Jews, to the world; but God's favor can be lost, His blessing forfeited. I was disheartened till I realized that discount, as each one must, with reality. We mustn't allow each to dominate the whole.

**UNITY WITH GOD**

Gratitude to the critics of the Declaration, who examine the whole understanding of Christians and of Judah, on the Declaration, to the reader into the Church was altogether too late, have spoken.

It might be that theology at last, we never afraid, by mere group of London the to place the "The Church would phrases that future."

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that discouragement can never be the way of a Christian and that each one must do his share to make the printed document a living reality. We must give thanks for the divine gift of a conciliar statement on the brotherhood of Christians and Jews.

UNITY WITH ISRAEL

GRATITUDE and joy notwithstanding, we cannot ignore the various critics of the Declaration; we must listen to their strictures and examine their arguments. Such attention will help us toward a better understanding of some of the issues that underlie the relationship of Christians and Jews. Lest my attempt to evaluate some adverse opinions on the Declaration that have appeared in print mislead even a single reader into thinking that the public response to the Council’s action was altogether negative, I should first like to quote a few men who have spoken out in favor of it.

It might be a good idea to begin with Hans Kung, professor of theology at the University of Tubingen, for he is known as a man never afraid to speak his mind, a man guided by his conscience, never by mere group loyalty. Last December, he wrote in The Sunday Times of London that in its Statement on the Jews the Council had attempted to place the relationship to Judaism on a new and positive basis: "The Church proclaims her indissoluble unity with Israel; the few phrases that were not included in the text are not decisive for the future."

In 1964, at the third session, the bishops accepted a provisional draft. Part of it read: "May all see to it that nothing be taught ... that could give rise to hatred or contempt of the Jews in the hearts of the faithful. May the Jewish people never be presented as one rejected or guilty of deicide." In the final version of 1965, the words "guilty of deicide" were eliminated. Again, for the warning not to teach anything that could give rise to hatred or contempt, another was substituted, namely, not to teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Another change was this: Where it formerly said that the Council "decries and condemns hatred as well as persecutions of Jews" it says now: "The Church ... decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism. ..." It was to these
and other changes Father Küng referred when he wrote that he did not consider them decisive for the future. Rather, he held, "this unambiguous rejection of anti-Semitism and call for cooperation with the Jews introduces a new period of Judaeo-Christian relations."

To the voice of Father Küng, I should like to add that of Pastor Georges Richard-Molard, a minister of the French Reformed Church and official observer at the Council. He admires the "almost heroic tenacity of those who drafted the document after having understood what the Church really says and having discerned the signs of the times." In an article published in Réforme in October 1965, he maintains that the Declaration passes the test.

Addressing his fellow-Protestants, he continues: "We would act in bad faith, if we did not overcome our reservations in order to render joyful homage to one of the finest pages in Christian theology, a page that is at one and the same time a reparation and a consolation, however belated." The document is not "a strictly Roman Catholic achievement," he adds, but the fruit of studies pursued by Catholic and Protestant scholars alike.

To complete the roster of friends of the Declaration—though each one quoted stands for several people thinking like him—I quote from the October 22, 1965, editorial in the London Jewish Chronicle, the most significant Jewish newspaper in English:

Though some, inside the Catholic Church and outside, will regret recent amendments and modifications, the declaration opens a new chapter in the relations of Catholic nations and the Jewish people. Its full effects will not be immediately apparent; some may take decades as old habits are eradicated. But this is a short space of time indeed for the eternal people, which has scarcely seen a generation pass during 2000 years without one of its communities suffering persecution, if not martyrdom... The act (the final vote showing that the opposition was numerically slight) has increased the stature of the Roman Catholic Church and symbolizes an historic turning-point in its evolution.

Each of the writers states that the changes made in the Declaration before its final adoption do not empty the document of its meaning but leave its substance intact. They do not impair the purpose it is to serve, states the director of the World Jewish Congress, "This Declaration refers to the original Jewish relations with the Christian faith..."
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it is to serve. In the words of Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, national
director of the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American
Jewish Committee, "The final draft is disappointing when compared
to the original, but when we consider the entire history of Catholic-
Jewish relations, it is an incredible achievement."

THE DEICIDE ISSUE

Not all Jewish comments, I am sorry to say, were as sober as those
of Rabbi Tanenbaum and the Jewish Chronicle. When it became
known that the final text had dropped any reference to deicide, Rabbi
Abraham Joshua Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary issued
this statement: "Not to condemn the demonic canard of deicide, a
cause of murder and pogroms, would mean condoning Auschwitz,
defiance of the God of Abraham and an act of paying homage to
Satan."

Even if one makes full allowance for the frustration of his par-
ticular hopes and his general fondness for the dramatic phrase, one
remains baffled. How could a man of Rabbi Heschel's stature so lose
his sense of proportion as to accuse the Council of paying tribute to
Satan? I do not think the Rabbi fully meant what he said. He has
since accepted an honorary degree from a Catholic university and he
would be the last one to accept an honor from men he really con-
sidered submissive to the devil.

Rabbi Heschel has had several imitators. Under the heading "Justice
Has Not Been Done," the Cleveland Jewish News asked with regard
to the change that so upset the Rabbi: "Does the anti-Semite need
more than this widely publicized deletion to confirm him in his anti-
Semitism—to maintain and insist that the charge of deicide may
properly be made against the Jewish people?" One may ask in turn:
"Whose fault is it that the deletion was widely publicized and—what
is worse—wrongly interpreted?" Certainly not the Council's.

One may regret the deletion—I do so most keenly—and yet un-
derstand why it was done. An Eastern Patriarch, separated from Rome
as well as from the Orthodox Church, used the issue to stir up hostility
against the Catholic Church. In a well-planned campaign he tried to
persuade his people and other Christians in the Near East that, by eliminating "deicide" from the vocabulary of preachers and teachers, the Church of Rome was showing that she has abandoned belief in Christ's divinity. This was, of course, nonsense. But there is no absurdity that will not find its takers, no slander that will not obtain the consent of gullible men.

It is the charge of deicide rather than the Council's silence that is an insult to Christ, for to use the mystery of the Passion to incite men whose horizon is that of the back alleys of the world is not only an outrage upon justice and humanity, it tears to shreds, as it were, the divine love that hovered over Calvary. But is it not understandable that many hearts in Rome ached, that they were troubled by the thought that the clearing up of one misunderstanding should create another, that for every bleeding stilled, another injury should be inflicted?

I have every sympathy for someone who answers: "I understand, still I think no one in Rome should have yielded an inch, conceded a single letter to blackmailers." But I have little sympathy for those twisters who try to make the ultimate silence of the Council on the deicide issue appear as its quiet confirmation of the charge. This is the height of illogic; at times, it seems to be a sign of ill-will. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Cleveland Jewish News editorial is of the second kind.

The writer even declares:

Far from sounding the death-knell of anti-Semitism, as some over-enthusiastic Jewish spokesmen are saying, the Declaration and the discussion preceding it have in some ways given a kind of rationale for Jew-hatred, with all the talk about "Jewish responsibility for the death of Christ."

What is the reason for such bitterness, for the hostile and self-destructive impulse a few Jewish interpreters of the conciliar Statement on the Jews seem to obey, and for an attack on the Council as injudicious as that by Rabbi Heschel? Why were not all Jews comforted by the Declaration? Why did they not all express a sense of relief or some chastened joy? Why could not all see things with the eyes of the Israeli, André Israeli, [that] the modern universities of the world is not as it is. A Jew—Rosmarin, editor of the Cleveland Jewish News—could have done a purging of feelings, a purging of self-esteem, an explanation. Why did not the writer take expressions of joy amongst Jews?

HARSH WORDS

A SWEEPING of the final verdict, the now worse than ever. But all this is not the reason. Why make the worst of things? Why do not more Jews see that the Council has a purging of feelings, a purging of the self-esteem, and an expression of joy amongst Jews? A Jew, Rosmarin, editor of the Cleveland Jewish News—could have done a purging of feelings, a purging of self-esteem, an explanation. Why did not the writer take expressions of joy amongst Jews?
A SWEEPING criticism by a few Jews and Protestants is that, no matter how perfect the text of the Declaration might have been, it could have done little good as long as the New Testament remains as it is. A Jewish representative of this thesis is Dr. Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, editor of the *Jewish Spectator*; a Protestant champion is Professor Roy Eckardt of Lehigh University.
In The Christian Century, March 23, 1966, Professor Eckardt says that the so-called watering down of the Declaration is due to "the anti-Semitic virus [which] is a chronically nagging presence in the Christian corpus (the body of the sacred writings of Christianity)." Again, he writes: "The New Testament ... contains the beginnings of anti-Semitic hostility. ... As long as the Church continues to stand up to 'read the word of God' it has to accept the consequences. It must find that certain 'lessons' in and of themselves sustain and propagate a derogatory image of 'the Jews.'"

It is true, the portrayal of Jews, crowds, teachers, and officials in the New Testament is not always pleasant, it is never flattering. But in this the New Testament does not stand alone; on the contrary, it follows the Old. Out of a hundred and more examples let me pick two.

1. When the Israelites in the desert approached the land of Canaan, Moses sent twelve scouts into the hill country. The scouts reported that the land was one flowing with milk and honey, but that its people were too strong for the Israelites; some of them were truly giants, compared with whom the scouts felt like mere grasshoppers. The people became so discouraged that they grumbled: "If only we had died in Egypt or died here in the desert! Why is the Lord taking us to that land to fall by the sword? ... Let us head back for Egypt..."

Whereupon, the Book of Numbers reports, the Lord appeared to Moses and said: "How long will this people spurn me? How long will they refuse to believe in me, despite all the signs I have performed in their midst? I will strike them with pestilence and disown them" (14:10-12). Moses then pleaded with God: "Pardon the wickedness of this people in keeping with your great kindness, as you have forgiven them ever since Egypt" (14:19). On Moses' request, the Lord refrained from carrying out His threat. Still, none of them was to see the promised land.

2. Or take God's indictment against Israel and Judah at the beginning of the Book of Isaiah.

Hear, O heavens, and listen O earth, for the Lord speaks:
Sons have I raised and reared, but they have disowned me!
Professor Eckardt evaluates due to the lagging presence of the writings of Christ to the Church contains the Church's need to accept these writings of themselves as Jews.

In the desert or the indictment against Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah, seven centuries before Christ. Yet Dr. Eckardt has the audacity to speak of the "immorality of so many of the recorded sentiments of New Testament writers." To say this is not an innocent slip, it is a serious error that betrays lack of understanding: ignorance of the nature of biblical speech. What to Western ears may sound like rudeness, like acerbity, like abuse, is often, on the lips of biblical man, concern grave and anxious.

Moreover, that the ancient Israel had men in her midst who did not bow before the mighty, who boldly took her leaders, the priests, the teachers, the rich—oppressors of the poor—and the multitudes to task; that she even preserved the words of the witnesses is an abiding honor, it is a glorious feature of her history. It is even proof that Israel's and our Scriptures are not merely the work of men, who ever tend to be partisan, who ever seek to gloss over, or cover up, the faults of their own flesh and blood.

Paradoxically, the harsh utterances of Scripture—as much as, if not more than, the consoling ones—point to the Holy Spirit as the author of the Bible and the guardian of Israel: the director of her destiny.

Wrong though it is to find anti-Semitism in the Old or the New Testaments—let us never forget that all the sacred writers save one were Jews and in most instances wrote for Jews or Jewish Christians—it cannot be doubted that untutored or unexplained reading of certain passages may lead to contempt of Jews.

None of the reproaches heaped upon their contemporaries either by Jesus or by the apostles equal the sentence against the Israelites in the desert or the indictment against Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah, seven centuries before Christ. Yet Dr. Eckardt has the audacity to speak of the "immorality of so many of the recorded sentiments of New Testament writers." To say this is not an innocent slip, it is a serious error that betrays lack of understanding: ignorance of the nature of biblical speech. What to Western ears may sound like rudeness, like acerbity, like abuse, is often, on the lips of biblical man, concern grave and anxious.

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SCRIPTURE MISREAD

If space were ample it would be quite useful to examine often-misunderstood sentences or passages, one by one, against their Hebrew background. Such an examination would show that what at a quick glance may seem to be anti-Semitic is Jewish in the deepest sense of the word. But space does not permit a wide-ranging exegesis. A single example will have to convey the proof: the use of "the Jews" in the fourth Gospel.

Modern exegetes agree that the expression is in many instances a technical term by which the evangelist designates the opponents of Jesus, that is, the religious authorities, particularly the religious authorities in Jerusalem hostile to Jesus, to His Gospel, and to His entire mission. But why? Why are they not simply called adversaries, even plotters against Him? Why "the Jews," when it is obvious that in all passages in which the expression seems to have a pejorative meaning, it refers to a few, and not to all Jews?

Why were "the Jews" chosen—to use the phrase of a Scandinavian scholar—to present the "world in its hostility to God"; the world—the very one He had created—that failed to recognize Him (Jn 1:10)? Take, for instance, the story of "The Man Born Blind." After Jesus healed him on a Sabbath day, some of His antagonists started an investigation in the course of which they asked the parents of the man who had been blind how it came that he now saw. The parents, however, avoided any direct answer "for fear of the Jews" (Jn 9:22). But they, themselves, were Jews, as was their son.

The idea of Israel's representative character is not new; only the use John made of it is new. According to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem, and in particular Mount Zion, is the middle of the universe. In the days to come, the rabbis hold, Jerusalem will be the mother city of the world. For the prophets before them, messianic Jerusalem was to be the place to which the nations stream and from which instruction and the word of God go forth (Is 2:2–3). Hence, the city is the center of salvation, the focus of grace, the home of faith. For the evangelist, Jesus' mission to Israel is really a mission to the entire world: It is there that He fulfills His ministry to all mankind.

To this John adds a negative aspect: He sees the world's opposition brought together, and the expression used to introduce such parties there, "the Jews," as if constant and constant, "the Jews" in John, as if profoundly the world.

To avoid such interpretations, important, it is essential to understand this, important to recognize that the expression does not, even when a gospel passage seems to convey a pejorative meaning, mean so. Were this done, one would probably have to ascribe the use of the expression has not been rendered adequately. We refer to what we call "Tanhists.

Since the expression has become a foreign concept, the use of it, passport as it were, to designate the world, not to obscure the fact that it is free Scripture to call the Jews and the contempt felt for them, an effort word must be added: hearts must be summed up, the Christian mind, just as newspapers, literature, and Christian books, like the Church herself, must of esteem and
brought together at Jerusalem whose officialdom gives concentrated expression to man’s hostility toward His Redeemer. Thus, the authorities there, “the Jews,” become the representatives of the ubiquitous and constant resistance to the divine offer of renewal. All in all, "the Jews" in John’s Gospel is a literary device for the expression of a profound theological thought.

To avoid misunderstanding, every translation should have some such interpretation of the Johannine terminology. Yet, a footnote like this, important though it is, would not be enough. Nor would it suffice to print “the Jews” always between quotation marks as some scholars have done, because these marks could not be heard whenever a gospel passage is read aloud. Perhaps the safest way to escape an erroneous and prejudicial way of interpreting "the Jews" would be to render the Greek hoI J udaioi with the English “the Judeans.” Were this done in the proclamation of the Gospel on Sundays, everyone would grasp that something special is said here, that the expression has nothing to do with the common, often vulgar way, in which we refer to other nationalities, other groups.

Since the reading of holy Scripture is in many ways like entering a foreign country, every translator ought to give to his readers a passport as it were, to that alien territory. He must also take care not to obscure the saving message by vernacular expressions whose connotations are quite different from those of the original ones. To free Scripture from all misinterpretations, particularly those begetting contempt for Jews, is an effort demanded by the Declaration, an effort worthy of all our pains. The best minds and most sympathetic hearts must apply themselves to this task, for the sake of Scripture and the Church as much as for the Jews.

One cannot take the Council and its Statement on the Jews seriously unless one fights every disparaging or scornful view of the Jews. But such combat must be the preparation for something higher. "Don’ts" are always easier to formulate than "do’s" but the "do’s" are weightier than the "don’ts." It was in this spirit that Père Michel Riquet summed up the conciliar Statement in one of the leading French newspapers, Le Figaro: "From now on, it will not be enough for a Christian not to hate the Jews. He is being asked to understand, esteem and love the Jew as a brother."
A HOPE SHARED

BROTHERHOOD is also the theme of another comment, by Professor Kurt Schubert, professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Vienna, writing in *Bibel und Liturgie* (1966). It may well be the keenest of the many evaluations that have appeared here and abroad. Pointing to the introductory paragraph of the section on the Jews, which stresses the spiritual bond that ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham’s stock, Schubert speaks of the exceptional position this section holds in the total framework of the Declaration on the theme: Relationship to Non-Christian Religions.

Judaism is not a religion like any other non-Christian religion, rather it is founded on the same Covenant and the same promises that Christianity is. Judaism is thus more than a non-Christian religion, for there exists, according to Schubert, not only an *ecumene* of the confessors of Christ but also one of the confessors of the Covenant. The God of the Covenant, the God who makes His creature His partner and coworker is the God of both Christians and Jews.

Commonly, the difference between them is expressed this way. We Christians believe that the Messiah has come while Jews still await His coming. But this description is inexact and incomplete. True, the traditional Jew hopes that the Messiah will come, but so does the Christian who expects Christ’s return in splendor and majesty, when the full glory of God will be disclosed and the rich first fruits of our redemption made manifest, when a new heaven and a new earth will be a reality and the petition, “Thy kingdom come,” lastingly fulfilled.

Seen in this light, Christians and Jews are bound together, not only by their faith in the one living God—the God of love and hence of election—but also by their hope in the ultimate realization of God’s reign. There is, then, an *ecumene*, a brotherhood, a common march, of those who share in this eschatological hope.

In our survey of the varied reactions to the conciliar Statement on the Jews, we have come full circle. We began with those who hailed the document as a giant step the Church took in obeying her commission to love. We then gave some attention to those who were dissatisfied with it. Now we have returned to those who, undeterred by the critics, proclaim the message of the Statement as one of brotherhood.
Were I asked to sum up our findings in a few simple words I would say: Yes, No, and Nevertheless. Thanks be to God for those whose eyes were wide open so that they could see the Statement’s depth and affirm it. Sad though it is that it was met by so many “Noes,” the no-sayers will not have the last word. The Declaration will bear fruit, abundant fruit—comments like those of Pére Riquet and Professor Schubert are pledges of things-to-come.