



# Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis

14/06/1985 | Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

Vatican May, 1985

## COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

Vatican City 1985

### Notes on the Correct Way to

Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and

Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church

### A Note on the Preparation of the Document:

The document published here is the result of long and considered work by our Commission.

At the beginning of March 1982, delegates of episcopal conferences and other experts met in Rome to examine a first draft. It was in the course of preparations for this meeting that requests from various quarters came to the Commission, asking that a guide be prepared. Such a guide would be for the use of all those in the Church who have the difficult task of presenting Jews and Judaism to the Catholic faithful in the light of new pastoral and doctrinal developments. These developments flow from the conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 4, published twenty years ago and also from the *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate* (n. 4), published by our Commission at the end of 1974.

The idea was to be of help to those engaged in catechetical work, in teaching and also in preaching, and to put into practice the new directions just mentioned, which are not always easy to translate into teaching methods.

The preparatory work went on for three years. There were several consultations with our consultants in Rome and elsewhere, resulting in several subsequent drafts. Clearly, throughout these stages of the work, and above all in the final one, the drafters kept well in mind what the Holy Father has had to say on Jewish-Catholic relations. He has addressed this subject on various important occasions, from Paris to Mainz, from Brooklyn to Caracas and Madrid, and many times in Rome itself. Neither could the drafters forget the various documents published in recent years by several episcopal conferences. And, at the same time, the Commission along with its consultants and experts took into account the accumulated experience of many years of nearly daily contact with our Jewish partners. For all of that, the text is and remains a document of the Catholic Church.

This means that its language, its structure, and the questions it intends to address belong to the teaching and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church.

As is normal procedure with any document published by a department of the Holy See, other departments with competency in the subject matter were consulted. Their observations have been dutifully and carefully taken into account. It is both our duty and our pleasure to express our gratitude and appreciation publicly to them for their patient and fruitful collaboration with us.

The document, in this its final version, bears the title *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church*. The first word of the title (*Notes*) appropriately indicates the *aim* of the text. It is intended to provide a helpful frame of reference for those who are called upon in various ways in the course of their teaching assignments to speak about Jews and Judaism and who wish to do so in keeping with the current teaching of the Church in this area. As everyone knows, this happens quite often. In fact, it is a practical impossibility to present Christianity while abstracting from the Jews and Judaism, unless one were to suppress the Old Testament, forget about the Jewishness of Jesus and the Apostles, and dismiss the vital cultural and religious context of the primitive Church. Neither is it an alternative to present one and the other in a prejudiced, unfavorable light. It is precisely this way of acting that the Council wanted to put to an end. That was also the aim that the 1974 *Guidelines* addressed more or less on the level of general principles. It is exactly the same aim that the present *Notes* address on a more concrete level—one might almost say in handbook style, as long as one keeps in mind the limitations of a text that cannot and should not be too lengthy.

Hence, the *structure* of the document. It starts with a series of "Preliminary Considerations," which introduce the spirit and the rationale of the text, mostly with the help of quotations from the Council, the Holy Father, or from preceding documents. Thereupon follows a *first section* called "Religious Teaching and Judaism," in which the doctrinal and pastoral principles underlying such teaching are set forth. Of special note is paragraph n. 3, which speaks about Judaism as a present reality and not only as a "historical" (and thus superseded) reality. Also to be noted is n. 5 on the complexity of both the historical and the religious relationships between the Church and Judaism. In this same section there is an affirmation that is important for the Catholic Church concerning the centrality of Christ and his unique value in the economy of salvation (n. 7). Clearly this does not mean, however, that the Jews cannot and should not draw salvific gifts from their own traditions. Of course, they can, and should do so.

A *second section* is entitled "Relations between the Old and New Testaments". This tries to help put into practice the directions of the Second Vatican Council that call for providing the Catholic faithful with access to a fuller and richer knowledge of Holy Scripture (cf. *Dei Verbum*, nn. 21-22 and *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 51). This especially includes the Old Testament. It is not always an easy matter to present the relations between both Testaments in a way that fully respects the validity of the Old Testament and shows its permanent usefulness for the Church. At this point, an effort is made to explain the meaning of what is called "typology", since on this a large part of our liturgical use of the Old Testament is grounded. In no way is "typological" usage a devaluation of the validity proper to the Old Testament. Rather, to the contrary. one can see this from another angle, since it has always been taught in the Catholic tradition that there is also a "typological" use of the New Testament with respect to the "last things" or eschatological realities (cf. n. 16). The importance of the Old Testament for Judaism is underlined. So, too, is the importance of Jews and Christians hearing the Old Testament together, so that together, in the path opened by the prophetic tradition, we may become more deeply engaged as fellow partisans for humanity today (nn. 18, 19). The significance of the continuity of the Jewish people in history is again mentioned toward the end of this document (cf. n. 33). It should also be noted that the limits of a "typological" usage are acknowledged, and other possible ways of reading the Old Testament in relation to the New are not excluded (cf. n. 11).

The *third section* speaks about the "Jewish Roots of Christianity". Here we turn to the New Testament and try to show that the Jewishness of Jesus and the Judaism of his time are far from being something marginal or incidental. On the contrary, they are connected with the very dynamic of the Incarnation. Thus, they have a specific value in the divine plan of salvation. The relationship of Jesus to the biblical law is carefully assessed (n. 21). So, too, are his relations to the Jewish religious institutions of his time, including the Temple (n. 22). Also carefully assessed are his contacts with the Pharisees, who constituted a movement within the Judaism of his time with which, beyond doubt, he had very close relations and to which he was very near—notwithstanding appearances to the contrary, about which more is said in the subsequent section.

This *fourth section* is, in fact, given over to the problem of the way "The Jews in the New Testament" are presented. On the basis of an exceedingly superficial analysis, some (Jews and Christians) feel that the New Testament is "anti-Semitic". By contrast, in this document the sound and proven results of recent scholarly exegesis are taken into account. Relying on this evidence, principles and criteria are offered to teachers for the presentation and explanation of texts that can create difficulty, whether these are found in the Gospel of John or in other New Testament writings. There is no intention, however, of hiding the fact of the disbelief of Jews in Jesus, a fact which is here called "sad", just as it is in the well-known text of the Letter to the Romans (9:2). In fact, it is from this point that the division and enmity between Christians and Jews originated, and it is also from this fact that the present urgent need for reconciliation derives, as is very carefully noted (cf. n. 29 D). At the same time, with no less care, it is emphasized that no one can judge the conscience of another, neither of others in the past nor—still less—of others today (ibid. E, F). In this connection, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on religious liberty must constantly be kept in mind, since this is "one of the bases on which rests the Jewish-Christian dialogue promoted by the Council" (ibid. F). A special paragraph is dedicated to the "delicate question of responsibility for the death of Christ" (n. 30). No attempt is made, however, to enter into complex and difficult historical questions. Rather, in keeping with the viewpoint of the Catechism of the Council of Trent (here quoted explicitly), the text focuses on the theological significance of the death of Christ and our participation in it as sinners. From this perspective, the historical role of "those few Jews" and those few Romans in Jesus' passion becomes a very secondary matter. (The Creed of the Catholic Church has always mentioned Pontius Pilate in relation with the death of Christ, not the Jews.)

In the *fifth section* reference is made to the liturgy and to similarities and points of contact with Jewish worship. Specific mention is made of the source of our prayers, of the cycle of feasts, and of the very structure itself of our eucharistic prayers.

A *sixth section* contains material altogether new in this series of documents. It intends to offer some information on the common history of Judaism and Christianity down through the centuries, a history that unfortunately is largely unknown or poorly understood if not altogether distorted. In this section, the central elements are chiefly three. First, the permanence of Judaism and, as we say, its theological significance, "which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness—often heroic—of its fidelity to the one God" (n. 33). Second, the "religious attachment" of the Jews to the "land of their forefathers", which Christians are encouraged to try to understand (ibid.). And third, the creation of the State of Israel. This is taken up with extreme precision. It is said that the "perspective" in which the State should be "envisaged" is not "in itself religious". It should be seen "in ... reference to the common principles of international law" which govern the existence of the various states and their place in the community of nations (ibid.). It will surely be noted that for the first time in a document of this Commission, in different but related paragraphs, reference is made to the land and the state. A brief sentence at the end of the paragraph refers to the "extermination" of the Jews (in Hebrew, the *shoah*, i.e., the catastrophe) during the dark years of the Nazi persecution. It calls upon Catholics to understand how decisive such a tragedy was for the Jews, a tragedy that is also obviously ours. Several teaching aids have been prepared, including those by Catholic offices for education, to help Catholics better comprehend the senseless dimensions of

this tragedy and to grasp better its significance. Our Commission is gratified by these efforts and, with this brief emphasis, would like to indicate in them the path to be followed.

Here again (cf. n. 34), as well as toward the beginning of the document (cf. n. 8), the text repeats its condemnation of anti-Semitism. This time, however, that condemnation is explicitly linked with the necessity of a "precise, objective, and rigorously accurate teaching on Judaism", which is the aim of these *Notes*. We are well aware that much has been done to dispel what has been called the "teaching of contempt" (the expression comes from the famous Jewish historian from France, Jules Isaac). But much still remains to be done, not least because new forces of racism and anti-Semitism remain ever ready to rise.

The aim of the *Notes* is, thus, a thoroughly positive one, as the "Conclusion" states. They seek to promote the formation of Catholics equipped "not only for objectivity, justice, and tolerance" (which would already mean a lot), but "also for understanding dialogue". Indeed, "our two traditions are so related that they cannot ignore each other (as is still frequently the case). It remains a constant necessity that "mutual knowledge ... be encouraged at every level".

It is our hope that the in-depth study of this text can be carried out by both parties in an atmosphere free of preconceptions and attentive to meaning and sometimes delicate nuances of many paragraphs. This will help us toward our highly desired goal, which is also the indispensable condition for our united and truly efficacious action together in behalf of the ideals we hold dear and which we have inherited from our shared biblical tradition.

Rome, June 24, 1985

*Monsignor Jorge Mejía*, Secretary

Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

---

## Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism

in Preaching and Catechesis of the Roman Catholic Church

### **Preliminary considerations**

On March 6, 1982, Pope John Paul II told delegates of episcopal conferences and other experts, meeting in Rome to study relations between the Church and Judaism:

... you yourselves were concerned, during your sessions, with Catholic teaching and catechesis regarding Jews and Judaism ... We should aim, in this field, that Catholic teaching at its different levels, in catechesis to children and young people, presents Jews and Judaism, not only in an honest and objective manner, free from prejudices and without any offences, but also with full awareness of the heritage common [to Jews and Christians].

In this passage, so charged with meaning, the Holy Father plainly drew inspiration from the Council

Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 4, which says:

All should take pains, then, lest in catechetical instruction and in the preaching of God's Word they teach anything out of harmony with the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ;

as also from these words:

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred Synod wishes to foster and recommend mutual understanding and respect ...

In the same way, the *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate"* (n. 4) ends its chapter III, entitled "Teaching and Education", which lists a number of practical things to be done, with this recommendation:

Information concerning these questions is important at all levels of Christian instruction and education. Among sources of information, special attention should be paid to the following:

catechisms and religious textbooks;

history books;

the mass media (press, radio, cinema, television).

The effective use of these means presupposes the thorough formation of instructors and educators in training schools, seminaries, and universities (AAS 77,1975, p. 73).

The paragraphs that follow are intended to serve this purpose.

## I. Religious Teaching and Judaism

1. In *Nostra Aetate*, 4, the Council speaks of the "spiritual bonds linking" Jews and Christians and of the "great spiritual patrimony" common to both, and it further asserts that "the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to the mystery of God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets".

2. Because of the unique relations that exist between Christianity and Judaism—"linked together at the very level of their identity" (John Paul II, March 6, 1982)—relations "founded on the design of the God of the Covenant" (*ibid.*), the Jews and Judaism should not occupy an occasional and marginal place in catechesis: their presence there is essential and should be organically integrated.

3. This concern for Judaism in Catholic teaching has not merely a historical or archaeological foundation. As the Holy Father said in the speech already quoted, after he had again mentioned the "common patrimony" of the Church and Judaism as "considerable": "To assess it carefully in itself and with due awareness of 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" (emphasis added). It is a question then of *pastoral* concern for a still living reality closely related to the Church. The Holy Father has stated this permanent reality of the Jewish people in a remarkable theological formula, in his allocution to the Jewish community of West

Germany at Mainz, on November 17, 1980: "... the people of God of the Old Covenant, which has never been revoked ..."

4. Here we should recall the passage in which the *Guidelines* (I) tried to define the fundamental condition of dialogue: "respect for the other as he is," knowledge of the "basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism", and again learning "by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience" (Introduction).

5. The singular character and the difficulty of Christian teaching about Jews and Judaism lie in this, that it needs to balance a number of pairs of ideas which express the relation between the two economies of the Old and New Testament:

- Promise and Fulfillment;
- Continuity and Newness;
- Singularity and Universality;
- Uniqueness and Exemplary Nature.

This means that the theologian and the catechist who deal with the subject need to show in their practice of teaching that:

- promise and fulfillment throw light on each other;
- newness lies in a metamorphosis of what was there before;
- the singularity of the people of the Old Testament is not exclusive and is open, in the divine vision, to a universal extension;
- the uniqueness of the Jewish people is meant to have the force of an example.

6. Finally, "work that is of poor quality and lacking in precision would be extremely detrimental" to Judaeo-Christian dialogue (John Paul II, speech of March 6, 1982). But it would be above all detrimental—since we are talking of teaching and education—to Christian identity (*ibid.*).

7. "In virtue of her divine mission, the Church" which is to be "the all-embracing means of salvation" in which alone "the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3), "must of her nature proclaim Jesus Christ to the world" (cf. *Guidelines*, I). Indeed, we believe that it is through him that we go to the Father (cf. Jn 14:6) "and this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (Jn 17:3).

Jesus affirms (*ibid.*, 10:16) that "there shall be one flock and one shepherd". Church and Judaism cannot then be seen as two parallel ways of salvation, and the Church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer for all, "while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*)" (*Guidelines*, I).

8. The urgency and importance of precise, objective, and rigorously accurate teaching on Judaism for our faithful follow too from the danger of anti-Semitism which is always ready to reappear under different guises. The question is not merely to uproot from among the faithful the remains of anti-Semitism still to be found here and there, but much rather to arouse in them, through educational work, an exact knowledge of the wholly unique "bond" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) which joins us as a Church to the Jews and to Judaism. In this way, they would learn to appreciate and love the latter, who have been chosen by God to prepare the coming of Christ and have preserved everything that was progressively revealed and given in the course of that preparation, notwithstanding their difficulty in recognizing in Him their Messiah.

## II. Relations between the Old<sup>1</sup> and the New Testaments

9. Our aim should be to show the unity of biblical Revelation (O.T. and N.T.) and of the divine plan, before speaking of each historical event, so as to stress that particular events have meaning when seen in history as a whole—from creation to fulfillment. This history concerns the whole human race and especially believers. Thus, the definitive meaning of the election of Israel does not become clear except in the light of the complete fulfillment (Rom 9-11), and election in Jesus Christ is still better understood with reference to the announcement and the promise (cf. Heb 4:1-11).

10. We are dealing with singular happenings which concern a singular nation but are destined, in the sight of God who reveals his purpose, to take on universal and exemplary significance.

The aim is, moreover, to present the events of the Old Testament not as concerning only the Jews but also as touching us personally. Abraham is truly the father of our faith (cf. Rom 4:11-12; Roman Canon: *patriarchae nostri Abrahae*). And, it is said (1 Cor 10:1): "our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea". The patriarchs, prophets, and other personalities of the Old Testament have been venerated and always will be venerated as saints in the liturgical tradition of the Oriental Church as also of the Latin Church.

11. From the unity of the divine plan derives the problem of the relation between the Old and New Testaments. The Church already from apostolic times (cf. 1 Cor 10:11; Heb 10:1) and then constantly in tradition resolved this problem by means of typology, which emphasizes the primordial value that the Old Testament must have in the Christian view. Typology, however, makes many people uneasy and is perhaps the sign of a problem unresolved.

12. Hence, in using typology, the teaching and practice of which we have received from the liturgy and from the Fathers of the Church, we should be careful to avoid any transition from the Old to the New Testament which might seem merely a rupture. The Church, in the spontaneity of the Spirit, which animates her, has vigorously condemned the attitude of Marcion<sup>2</sup> and always opposed his dualism.

13. It should also be emphasized that typological interpretation consists in reading the Old Testament as preparation and, in certain aspects, outline and foreshadowing of the New (cf. e.g., Heb 5:5-10, etc.). Christ is henceforth the key and point of reference to the Scriptures: "the rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4).

14. It is true then, and should be stressed, that the Church and Christians read the Old Testament in the light of the event of the dead and risen Christ and that on these grounds there is a Christian reading of the Old Testament which does not necessarily coincide with the Jewish reading. Thus, Christian identity and Jewish identity should be carefully distinguished in their respective reading of the Bible. But, this detracts nothing from the value of the Old Testament in the Church and does nothing to hinder Christians from profiting discerningly from the traditions of Jewish reading.

15. Typological reading only manifests the unfathomable riches of the Old Testament, its inexhaustible content and the mystery of which it is full, and should not lead us to forget that it retains its own value as Revelation that the New Testament often does no more than resume (cf. Mk 12:29-31). Moreover, the New Testament itself demands to be read in the light of the Old. Primitive Christian catechesis constantly had recourse to this (cf e.g., 1 Cor 5:6-8; 10:1-11).

16. Typology further signifies reaching toward the accomplishment of the divine plan, when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). This holds true also for the Church which, realized already in Christ, yet awaits its definitive perfecting as the Body of Christ. The fact that the Body of Christ is still tending toward its full stature (cf. Eph 4:12-19) takes nothing from the value of being a Christian. So also the calling of the patriarchs and the Exodus from Egypt do not lose their importance and value in God's design from being at the same time intermediate stages (cf. e.g., *Nostra Aetate*, 4).

17. The Exodus, for example, represents an experience of salvation and liberation that is not complete in itself, but has in it, over and above its own meaning, the capacity to be developed further. Salvation and liberation are already accomplished in Christ and gradually realized by the sacraments in the Church. This makes way for the fulfillment of God's design, which awaits its final consummation with the return of Jesus as Messiah, for which we pray each day. The Kingdom, for the coming of which we also pray each day, will be finally established. With salvation and liberation the elect and the whole of creation will be transformed in Christ (Rom 8:19-23).

18. Furthermore, in underlining the eschatological dimension of Christianity, we shall reach a greater awareness that the people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending toward a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messiah—even if they start from two different points of view. It is more clearly understood that the person of the Messiah is not only a point of division for the people of God but also a point of convergence (cf. *Sussidi per l'ecumenismo* of the Diocese of Rome, n. 140). Thus, it can be said that Jews and Christians meet in a comparable hope, founded on the same promise made to Abraham (cf. Gen 12:1-3; Heb 6:13-18).

19. 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 the 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 neighbor, 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 (cf. *Guidelines*, IV).

### III. Jewish Roots of Christianity

20. Jesus was and always remained a Jew; his ministry was deliberately limited "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). Jesus is fully a man of his time and of his environment—the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hopes of which he shared. This cannot but underline both the reality of the Incarnation and the very meaning of the history of salvation, as it has been revealed in the Bible (cf. Rom 1:3-4; Gal 4:4-5).

21. Jesus' relations with biblical law and its more or less traditional interpretations are undoubtedly complex, and he showed great liberty toward it (cf. the "antitheses" of the Sermon on the Mount: Mt 5:21-48, bearing in mind the exegetical difficulties; his attitude to rigorous observance of the Sabbath: Mk 3:14, etc.).

But, there is no doubt that he wished to submit himself to the law (cf. Gal 4:4), that he was circumcised and presented in the Temple like any Jew of his time (cf. Lk 2:21,22-24), that he was trained in the law's observance. He extolled respect for it (cf. Mt 5:17-20) and invited obedience to it (cf. Mt 8:4). The rhythm of his life was marked by observance of pilgrimages on great feasts, even from his infancy (cf. Lk 2:41-50; Jn 2:13; 7:10, etc.). The importance of the cycle of the Jewish feasts has been frequently underlined in the Gospel of John (cf. 2:13; 5:1; 7:2,10,37; 10:22; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28; 19:42, etc.).

22. It should be noted also that Jesus often taught in the synagogues (cf. Mt 4:23; 9:35; Lk 4:15-18; Jn 18:20, etc.) and in the Temple (cf. Jn 18:20, etc.), which he frequented as did the disciples even after the Resurrection (cf. e.g., Acts 2:46; 3:1; 21:26, etc.). He wished to put in the context of synagogue worship the proclamation of his Messiahship (cf. Lk 4:16-21). But, above all, he wished to achieve the supreme act of the gift of himself in the setting of the domestic liturgy of the Passover, or at least of the paschal festivity (cf. Mk 14:1,12 and parallels; Jn 18:28). This also allows of a better understanding of the "memorial" character of the Eucharist.



23. Thus, the Son of God is incarnate in a people and a human family (cf. Gal 4:4; Rom 9:5). This takes away nothing, quite the contrary, from the fact that he was born for all men (Jewish shepherds and pagan wise men are found at his crib: Lk 2:8-20; Mt 2:1-12) and died for all men (at the foot of the cross there are Jews, among them Mary and John: Jn 19:25-27, and pagans like the centurion: Mk 15:39 and parallels). Thus, he made two peoples one in his flesh (cf. Eph 2:14-17). This explains why with the *Ecclesia ex gentibus* we have, in Palestine and elsewhere, an *Ecclesia ex circumcissione*, of which *Eusebius*, for example, speaks (H.E. IV,5).

24. His relations with the Pharisees were not always or wholly polemical. Of this there are many proofs:

- It is Pharisees who warn Jesus of the risks he is running (Lk 13:31);
- Some Pharisees are praised (e.g., "the scribe" of Mk 12:34);
- Jesus eats with Pharisees (Lk 7:36; 14:1).

25. Jesus shares, with the majority of Palestinian Jews of that time, pharisaic doctrines: the resurrection of the body; forms of piety, like alms-giving, prayer, fasting (cf. Mt 6:1-18), and the liturgical practice of addressing God as Father; the priority of the commandment to love God and our neighbor (cf. Mk 12:28-34). This is so also with Paul (cf. Acts 23:8), who always considered his membership of the Pharisees as a title of honor (cf. *ibid.*, 23:6; 26:5; Phil 3:5).

26. Paul also, like Jesus himself, used methods of reading and interpreting Scripture and of teaching his disciples which were common to the Pharisees of their time. This applies to the use of parables in Jesus' ministry, as also to the method of Jesus and Paul of supporting a conclusion with a quotation from Scripture.

27. It is noteworthy too that the Pharisees are not mentioned in accounts of the Passion. Gemaliel (Acts 5:34-39) defends the apostles in a meeting of the Sanhedrin. An exclusively negative picture of the Pharisees is likely to be inaccurate and unjust (cf. *Guidelines*, note 1; cf. *AAS*, loc. cit., p. 76). If in the Gospels and elsewhere in the New Testament there are all sorts of unfavorable references to the Pharisees, they should be seen against the background of a complex and diversified movement. Criticisms of various types of Pharisees are, moreover, not lacking in rabbinical sources (cf. the *Babylon Talmud*, the *Sotah* treatise 22b, etc.). "Pharisaism" in the pejorative sense can be rife in any religion. It may also be stressed that, if Jesus shows himself severe toward the Pharisees, it is because he is closer to them than to other contemporary Jewish groups (cf. *supra* n° 17).

28. All this should help us to understand better what St. Paul says (Rom 11:16) about the "root" and the "branches". The Church and Christianity, for all their novelty, find their origin in the Jewish milieu of the first century of our era, and more deeply still in the "design of God" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4), realized in the Patriarchs, Moses and the Prophets (*ibid.*), down to its consummation in Christ Jesus.

#### IV. The Jews in the New Testament

29. The *Guidelines* already say (note 1) that "the formula 'the Jews' sometimes, according to the context, means 'the leaders of the Jews' or 'the adversaries of Jesus', terms which express better the thought of the evangelist and avoid appearing to arraign the Jewish people as such".

An objective presentation of the role of the Jewish people in the New Testament should take account of these various facts:

- a. The Gospels are the outcome of long and complicated editorial work. The dogmatic

constitution *Dei Verbum*, following the Pontifical Biblical Commission's Instruction *Sancta Mater Ecclesia*, distinguishes three stages: "The sacred authors wrote the four Gospels, selecting some things from the many which had been handed on by word of mouth or in writing, reducing some of them to a synthesis, explicating some things in view of the situation of their Churches, and preserving the form of proclamation, but always in such fashion that they told us the honest truth about Jesus" (no 19)

Hence, it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favorable 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 of today.

All this should be taken into account when preparing catechesis and homilies for the last weeks of Lent and Holy Week (cf. already *Guidelines* II, and now also *Sussidi per l'ecumenismo nella diocesi di Roma* 1982, 144b).

- b. It is clear, on the other hand, that there were conflicts between Jesus and certain categories of Jews of his time, among them Pharisees, from the beginning of his ministry (cf. Mk 2:1-11,24; 3:6, etc.).
- c. There is, moreover, the sad fact that the majority of the Jewish people and its authorities did not believe in Jesus—a fact not merely of history but of theological bearing, of which St. Paul tries hard to plumb the meaning (Rom 9-11).
- d. This fact, accentuated as the Christian mission developed, especially among the pagans, led inevitably to a rupture between Judaism and the young Church, now irreducibly separated and divergent in faith, and this stage of affairs is reflected in the texts of the New Testament and particularly in the Gospels. There is no question of playing down or glossing over this rupture; that could only prejudice the identity of either side. Nevertheless it certainly does not cancel the spiritual "bond" of which the Council speaks (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) and which we propose to dwell on here.
- e. Reflecting on this in the light of Scripture, notably of the chapters cited from the epistle to the Romans, Christians should never forget that the faith is a free gift of God (cf. Rom 9:12) and that we should never judge the consciences of others. St. Paul's exhortation "do not boast" in your attitude to "the root" (Rom 11:18) has its full point here.
- f. 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 hidden with God (cf. Rom 11:25), the latter are in an entirely different situation. Vatican II in the declaration on *Religious Liberty* teaches that "all men are to be immune from coercion ... in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs. Nor ... restrained from acting in accordance with his own beliefs" (no 2). This is one of the bases—proclaimed by the Council—on which Judaeo-Christian dialogue rests.

30. The delicate question of responsibility for the death of Christ must be looked at from the standpoint of the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 4 and of *Guidelines* (III): "What happened in [Christ's] passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living without distinction nor upon the Jews of today", especially since "authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ". Again, further on: "Christ in his boundless love freely underwent his passion and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). The *Catechism* of the Council of Trent teaches that Christian sinners are more to blame for the death of Christ than those few Jews who brought it about—they indeed "knew not what they did" (cf. Lk 23:34), and we know it only too well (Pars I, caput V, Quaest. XI). In the same way and for the same reason, "the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy Scriptures" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4), even though it is true that "the Church is the new people of God" (ibid.).

## V. The Liturgy

31. Jews and Christians find in the Bible the very substance of their liturgy: for the proclamation of God's Word, response to it, prayer of praise and intercession for the living and the dead, recourse to the divine mercy. The Liturgy of the Word, in its own structure, originates in Judaism. The prayer of Hours and other liturgical texts and formularies have their parallels in Judaism, as do the very formulas of our most venerable prayers, among them the Our Father. The eucharistic prayers also draw inspiration from models in the Jewish tradition. As John Paul II said (Allocution of March 6, 1982), "... 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. Such is the case of liturgy ..."

32. This is particularly evident in the great feasts of the liturgical year, like the Passover. Christians and Jews celebrate the Passover: the Jews, the historic Passover looking toward the future; the Christians, the Passover accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ, although still in expectation of the final consummation (cf. *supra* n° 9). It is still the "memorial" which comes to us from the Jewish tradition, with a specific content different in each case. On either side, however, there is a like dynamism: for Christians it gives meaning to the eucharistic celebration (cf. the antiphon "o sacrum convivium"), a paschal celebration, and as such a making present of the past, but experienced in the expectation of what is to come.

## VI. Judaism and Christianity in History

33. The history of Israel did not end in A.D. 70 (cf. *Guidelines*, B). It continued, especially in a numerous Diaspora which allowed Israel to carry to the whole world a witness—often heroic—of its fidelity to the one God and to "exalt him in the presence of all the living" (Tb 13:4), while preserving the memory of the land of their forefathers at the heart of their hope (Passover *Seder*).

Christians are invited to understand this religious attachment which finds its roots in biblical tradition, without however making their own any particular religious interpretation of this relationship (cf. *Statement on Catholic-Jewish Relations*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, November 20, 1975).

The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law.

The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God's design. We must, in any case, rid ourselves of the traditional idea of people *punished*, preserved as a *living argument* for Christian apologetic. It remains a chosen people, "the pure olive on which were grafted the branches of the wild olive which are the gentiles" (John Paul II, March 6, 1982, alluding to Rom 11:17-24). We must remember how much the balance of relations between Jews and Christians over two thousand years has been negative. We must remind ourselves how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity, in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages, and in modern times, taking its start from a patrimony which we long shared, so much so that "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" (John Paul II, March 6, 1982). Catechesis should, on the other hand, help in understanding the meaning for the Jews of the extermination during the years 1939-1945, and its consequences.

34. Education and catechesis should concern themselves with the problem of racism, still active in different forms of anti-Semitism. The Council presented it thus: "Moreover [the Church], mindful of

her common patrimony with the Jews and motivated by the Gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). The *Guidelines* comment: "the spiritual bonds and historical links binding the Church to Judaism condemn (as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity) all forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination, which in any case the dignity of the human person alone would suffice to condemn" (Introduction).

## Conclusion

35. Religious teaching, catechesis, and preaching should be preparation not only for objectivity, justice, tolerance, but also for understanding and dialogue. Our two traditions are so related that they cannot ignore each other. Mutual knowledge must be encouraged at every level. There is evident, in particular, a painful ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism, of which only negative aspects and often caricature seem to form part of the stock ideas of many Christians.

That is what these notes aim to remedy. This would mean that the Council text and *Guidelines* would be more easily and faithfully put into practice.

(May 1985)

+Johannes Cardinal Willebrands (President)

Pierre Duprey (Vice-President)

Jorge Mejía (Secretary)

## Footnotes

1) We continue to use the expression *Old Testament* because it is traditional (cf. already 2 Cor 3:14) but also because "Old" does not mean "out-of-date" or "outworn". In any case, it is the *permanent* value of the O.T. as a source of Christian Revelation that is emphasized here (cf. *Dei Verbum*, 3).

2) A man of gnostic tendency who in the second century rejected the Old Testament and part of the New as the work of an evil god, a demiurge. The Church reacted strongly against this heresy (cf. Irenaeus).

Used with permission