



NEWS

FILE
COPY

DATE: June 24, 1985

FROM: Rev. Kenneth J. Doyle

O - 202/659-6700
H - 202/529-0256

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. CATHOLIC OFFICIAL HAILS NEW VATICAN DOCUMENT AS BREAKING DOWN CATHOLIC STEREOTYPES ABOUT JEWS

WASHINGTON--An official of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has called the Vatican's new document on Jews and Judaism "a welcome one, which will help to break down some of the stereotypes many Catholics have grown up with in their understanding of Jews and Judaism".

The document, called "Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" was issued June 24 by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and was printed in the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano on that same day.

Dr. Eugene Fisher, director of the NCCB's Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, listed some stereotypical Catholic attitudes which the document will help to counteract: seeing Jews as collectively guilty of the death of Jesus; seeing the Pharisees universally as hypocrites; positing Christianity as a religion of love, mercy and forgiveness over against Judaism as a religion of legalism, justice and strictness; and viewing the Jewish role as God's chosen people as having ended with the coming of Christ.

/more

NATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR INFORMATION

1312 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W. • WASHINGTON, D. C. 20005

2/Stereotypes

The document urges Catholics to a deep and serious study of Judaism in order to appreciate the common bonds which link it to Christianity. "Mutual knowledge must be encouraged at every level," says the document. "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".

The document highlights the fact that Christians and Jews share a common mission, which is to prepare the world for its transformation by the Messias.

"The people of God of the Old and the New Testament are tending towards a like end in the future: the coming or return of the Messias--even if they start from two different points of view," according to the document.

Christians and Jews, it says, should help prepare the world for the Messias "by working together for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation".

While, according to the document, the fullness of the means of salvation is found in the Church and the Church must of its nature proclaim Christ to the world and witness to Christ as the redeemer for all, still the Jews have a continuing role as "a chosen people". Also, the document points out, "Christians should never forget that the faith is a free gift of God... and that we should never judge the consciences of others".

/more

3/Stereotypes

As to responsibility for the death of Christ, the document notes that "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'... and we know it only too well".

The document quotes Pope John Paul II who said in an address in 1980 that the Covenant of God with the Jewish people "has never been revoked".

The document, said Dr. Fisher, would have Catholics "ponder deeply" what God might have in mind by maintaining the Jewish people in existence and continuing to bless them, despite their many trials and sufferings.

"Jews since the time of Christ," he pointed out, "have continued to give faithful witness to the Covenant and have continued to be a source of spiritual richness not only for Jews but for the world".

"Certainly," said Dr. Fisher, "without the Jews we would not understand our own religion completely, and it is a blessing for the entire world that Jews and Christians share a reciprocal understanding about preparing the world for the Messiah".

The document says that the state of Israel "should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in... reference to the common principles of international law;" and it invites Christians "to understand the religious attachment" which Jews feel for the land of their forefathers. According to Dr. Fisher, a Christian therefore need not

/more

4/Stereotypes

subscribe to a fundamentalist Scriptural interpretation for justifying the State of Israel but should see that justification as based on international law.

The new Vatican document, said Dr. Fisher, has been in preparation for several years and is a further explication of principles contained in the Second Vatican Council's declaration Nostra Aetate, in Guidelines published by the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1975 and in a declaration published by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States, also in 1975.

The new document will be used as a basis for preaching and catechizing throughout the Catholic world. Dr. Fisher sees a significance in the fact that the document is entitled "notes". "It is a source book for ideas at this stage, more than a finished product," he observed. "Now, for example, it will be up to authors of catechetical textbooks and pedagogical materials to weave these ideas into what they produce".

In the United States, the document will be sent to ecumenical officers and education officials in the nation's 181 Catholic dioceses.

#

A,X,ISR