

An Unspoken Dialogue

One of the momentous occurrences in the religious life of the present age was the convocation of the Second Vatican Council. Among the many decrees promulgated by the Council are several that touch directly or indirectly on the Jews. These propose new, more positive attitudes to be taken towards the Jews and their beliefs. It must be borne in mind throughout that the decrees of Vatican II are directed at Roman Catholics, to prescribe for them the proper beliefs and attitudes of the Roman Catholic Church. As such, they constitute the internal affairs of the Church, and, strictly regarded, are not the proper object of a non-Catholic's concern. It is not, then, because the Church has spoken about the Jews that I feel it proper to engage in the discussion that appears on these pages, rather it is because the Church has elected to go further, not only to speak about the Jews, but to them as well. In the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, an invitation is extended to the Jews to engage in "brotherly dialogues":

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred Synod wishes to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues.¹

¹ The Documents of Vatican II, ed. W. M. Abbott, S.J. (N.Y.: The America Press,

The following remarks constitute an affirmative response to the above invitation, and they are intended as a contribution to the furtherance of interreligious dialogue.

No better description of the nature of interreligious dialogue can be given than that which appears in the words of Vatican II itself:

. . . dialogue (takes place) between competent experts from different Churches and Communities. In their meetings, which are organized in a religious spirit, each explains the teaching of his Communion in greater depth and brings out clearly its distinctive features. Through such dialogue, everyone gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions.²

This description actually appears in the text with reference to the interchange that is part of the ecumenical activity intended to foster "unity among Christians."³ I feel, however, that it accords with the spirit of Vatican II to interpret its remarks generously, so that we may

1966), p. 665. In a note (21) to this statement, the translator makes the point even more explicit. "The Declaration endorses and promotes dialogue between Christians and Jews, just as the Decree on Ecumenism endorses and promotes dialogue between the separated Christian groups." (*The Documents of Vatican II* will hereafter be designated by *DV II*.)

² *DV II*, p. 347.

³ The *Decree on Ecumenism*, *ibid.*, p. 347.

add the word "religion" to Communion, and thus extend this statement of dialogue to interreligious as well as intra-Christian communication. One further point, of great importance, is made in the *Decree on Ecumenism* concerning the nature of dialogue. This is that dialogue does not involve compromise with principles. The point is stated with reference to the Catholic position:

The manner and order in which Catholic belief is expressed should in no way become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren. It is of course essential that doctrine be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning.⁴

In short, the principles governing religious dialogue, as laid down by Vatican II, are that a participant present his position to the other participant(s), that he do so in a religious spirit, and that his purpose be to communicate and clarify his own position rather than to indulge in polemics against other positions. In so doing, no compromise with accuracy or authenticity is to be made, the end of dialogue is served by truth alone.

At the present stage of interreligious relations this procedure is certainly a wise one, and delineates a course I will endeavor to follow. We must first learn the position of other religionists and

⁴ *DV II*, p. 354.

develop confidence in our ability to communicate with them before we raise with them the question of which position is true. Yet, though subscribing to this rule of dialogue in principle, difficulties do arise when the rule is applied in detail. These difficulties are inherent in Jewish-Catholic dialogue.⁵ They issue from the fact that the Jew and his religious beliefs are considered essential elements of Catholic theology—although the converse is not true.⁶ Hence who the Jew is, the nature of his Bible,⁷ his relation to God and history, his past and his future, are all subjects of Catholic doctrine. There cannot, then, although following the procedure outlined by Vatican II, be a dialogue between Catholic and Jew in which the Jew does not raise into question and even controvert Catholic belief, since in explaining himself and his religion the Jew discusses a subject on which there already exist Catholic dogmas. Yet in dialogue, such self-explanation is precisely what the Jew is called upon to give. This is no reason for Jew and Catholic to shrink from dialogue, but the reader should take the problem into account as we pro-

⁵ As in Jewish-Christian dialogue generally.

⁶ Christianity plays no role in any major Jewish system. It is occasionally referred to by way of comparison in some relatively modern systems.

⁷ I.e., the Old Testament. Jews do not, of course, use the designation "Old Testament" since they do not accept the existence of a new one. I will, however, use "Old Testament" when it is necessary for clarity.

ceed further, to an examination of Catholic belief concerning the Jews as it now emerges from Vatican II.

Two views on the Jews and Judaism may be discerned in the texts of Vatican II: the view to which the Church has generally and traditionally subscribed, and the new view prescribed by the Council. Contrary to widespread belief, the basic position of the Church regarding the Jews and Judaism was not changed by Vatican II. The new view of the Council merely alters certain non-essential elements of the total previous position. These elements were, however, most destructive, and their repudiation by Vatican II has been welcomed by enlightened religionists everywhere. As noted earlier, the beliefs of the Catholics regarding the Jews and Judaism form an essential part of the Catholic religion and we would not, therefore, expect a basic change in the nature of these beliefs unless Catholicism itself were to undergo a radical change. This very fact of the essential nature of Catholic belief regarding Judaism explains why, as I attempt to review and clarify the work of Vatican II respecting the Jews, it will be necessary to refer not only to beliefs that specifically concern Judaism, but to general principles of Catholic doctrine as well.

For the purposes of this review, the beliefs of Catholicism relating to the Jews will be divided into three parts: the basic position on Judaism; the traditional non-essential beliefs repudiated by Vatican II; the new beliefs

prescribed by Vatican II.

The basic position is summarized as follows:

1) The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are the foundation upon which the Roman Catholic religion is based and the primary source of its position on the Jews. These Scriptures, according to the Church, were authored by God and are therefore absolutely true so far as their religious content is concerned:

Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, holds that the books of both the Old and New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation.⁸

⁸ *DV II*, pp. 118f.

The revelation contained in the Old Testament is incomplete. Its primary purpose was to serve as a preparation for Christianity, the religion revealed in the New Testament:

The principal purpose to which the plan of the Old Covenant was directed was to prepare for the coming both of Christ, the Universal Redeemer, and of the messianic kingdom, to announce this coming by prophecy, and to indicate its meaning through various types.^{9 10}

The primary religious value of the Old Testament today, since its truth has been superseded, is to serve as a general support for Christianity:

These same books (the Old Testament), then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way.¹¹

Thus the Old Testament is completed and superseded by the New Testament, but the latter will itself never be superseded, it is the final word of God:¹²

The Christian dispensation, there-

⁹ I.e., signs.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 122.

¹¹ *DV II*, p. 122.

¹² It is of interest to note that the Muslims maintain the New Testament was superseded by the Koran. The difference between the Jewish and Muslim positions is that the Jews don't think the New Testament a "Testament" at all, whereas, the Muslims think it was a "Testament" but is now superseded by the Koran.

fore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹³

2) The concept of God revealed by Scriptures is of a person, the creator of the universe, who is omniscient, omnipotent, and self-revealing through words and miracles. God exercises providential care, intervening in history according to a divine plan for human salvation:

By an utterly free and mysterious decree of His own wisdom and goodness, the eternal Father created the whole world. His plan was to dignify men with a participation in His own divine life. . . . He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. She was prepared for in a remarkable way throughout the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant. Established in the present era of time, the Church was made manifest by the outpouring of the Spirit. At the end of time she will achieve her glorious fulfillment. Then, . . . all just men from the time of Adam . . . will be gathered together with the Father in the universal Church.¹⁴

3) Human salvation is deliverance from sin, death, and eternal damnation.

¹³ *DV II*, p. 113.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Salvation is brought about by God through Christ and the Church:

The Son, therefore, came on mission from His Father. . . . By His obedience He brought about redemption. . . . When the work which the Father had given the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might forever sanctify the Church, and thus all believers would have access to the Father through Christ in the one Spirit. He is the Spirit of Life, a fountain of water springing up to life eternal. Through Him the Father gives life to men who are dead from sin, till at last He revives in Christ even their mortal bodies.¹⁵

4) The primary obstacle to salvation is original sin. This is the sin incurred by every person as a result of Adam's disobedience against God in the Garden of Eden.¹⁶ When Adam fell, and violated God's commandment not to eat of the tree of knowledge, every future human being to come after him would be conceived guilty of the sin of rebellion against God.¹⁷ This sin deprives man of grace and makes him subject to evil and death. There is no salvation without making atonement for the original sin, and there is no atonement except through the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. The reason Jesus is in-

dispensable for atonement is that God's infinite majesty was offended by Adam's disobedience. Man, then, possessing only *finite* being, does not have the status to atone for the *infinite* offense in which he participates through Adam. Hence no matter how profound or sincere his remorse may be, man is unable through the use of his own powers to achieve salvation. An infinite offense requires an infinite atonement. This atonement became available to man with the appearance of Jesus. Jesus, as one of the persons of the Godhead, is infinite, hence his sacrifice on the cross has the power of an infinite act of atonement. Jesus therefore offered himself so that men could use his sacrifice as their vicarious act of infinite atonement. This is accomplished by believing in Jesus and taking him for one's own Savior.¹⁸ Thus once Jesus is accepted, the primary obstacle to salvation, the guilt of original sin, is removed.

5) Since God, in his infinite mercy, wished mankind to attain salvation, it was necessary to bring them to an acceptance of Jesus Christ, the only possible means of salvation. It is here that the Jew plays his role in the cosmic drama. God, beginning with Abraham, chose the Jews as the ones who would prepare the world for the coming of Jesus. Accordingly, He revealed to the Jews such knowledge of

Himself as was appropriate in a world without Christ,¹⁹ and communicated to them His promise of future salvation for all mankind. In this way the world would be prepared to recognize Jesus as the Christ when he came to fulfill that promise:

In carefully planning and preparing the salvation of the whole human race, the God of supreme love, by a special dispensation, chose for Himself a people to whom He might entrust His promise. First He entered into a covenant with Abraham and, through Moses, with the people of Israel. To this people which He had acquired for Himself, He so manifested Himself through words and deeds as the one true and living God that Israel came to know by experience the ways of God with men, and with God himself speaking to them through the mouth of the prophets, Israel daily gained a deeper and clearer understanding of His ways and made them more widely known among the nations. The plan of salvation, foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain per-

manently valuable.²⁰ . . . Now the books of the Old Testament in accordance with the state of mankind before the time of salvation established by Christ, reveal to all men the knowledge of God and of man and the ways in which God, just and merciful, deals with men. These books, though they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy.²¹

6) Once Jesus appeared, the preparatory phase of God's plan for human salvation ended. There was no further mission, task, or need for Judaism. Before the advent of Jesus, the nearest man could come to God was through Judaism,²² Jesus having come, Judaism became a fossil. It was no longer the true religion; and the Jews were no longer the Chosen People. The new People of God were the Christians, to be saved the Jews must convert to Christianity.

He (God) . . . chose the race of Israel as a people unto Himself. With it He set up a covenant. Step by step He taught this people by manifesting in its history both Himself and the decree of His will, and by making it holy unto Himself. All these things, however, were done by way of preparation and as a figure

¹⁹ I.e., only partial or incomplete truth could be given. This explains for the Catholic why there are no explicit references to Jesus in the Old Testament. The Jews, of course, maintain there are no references at all to Jesus in the Bible (Old Testament), neither explicit nor implicit.

²⁰ *DV II*, p. 121.

²¹ *DV II*, p. 122.

²² I.e., even before Christ Judaism did not offer salvation, only Christianity can do that. Before Christ, however, Judaism was the "nearest" man could come to God.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16f.

¹⁶ Cf. *DV II*, p. 15; *et al.*

¹⁷ Except the Virgin Mary, through the Immaculate Conception.

¹⁸ Apparently, just as the acceptance of Jesus is necessary for salvation, so is his acceptance in the manner prescribed by the Church necessary. Cf. *DV II*, p. 118; *et al.*

of that new and perfect covenant which was to be ratified in Christ, and of that more luminous revelation which was to be given through God's very Word made flesh.

Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant,²³ that is to say, the new testament, in His blood. . . .

This was to be the new People of God. For, those who believe in Christ, who are reborn not from a perishable but from an imperishable seed through the Word of the living God, not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit, are finally established as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. . . ."²⁴

7) Yet the Jews did not accept Christianity. Although they were the people chosen to receive God's promise of the coming Messiah, they did not recognize or acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.

At this point, Vatican II prescribes new doctrine to replace the traditional beliefs. The traditional beliefs may be described as follows:

8) The Jews not only refused to accept Christianity and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, they repudiated him. They charged he was a false Messiah; they

²³ Jewish and critical Bible scholars generally maintain this "new covenant" has nothing to do with Christianity. It refers rather to a new covenant, as it says, with the House of Israel or the Jews, i.e., an internal reform of Judaism. These are the differences of interpretation between Catholic and Jew that would be taken up in dialogue.

²⁴ *DV II*, p. 25.

brought about his arrest; they insisted upon his execution; and they were satisfied with his crucifixion. The Jews did this as an entire people, wilfully and maliciously—knowing better, since their own Scriptures had foretold the coming of Jesus as the Christ.

9) The entire Jewish people, therefore, till the end of time, is guilty of this crime.²⁵ They were and are unrepentant deicides. For their crime, the following divine punishments have been decreed by God against the Jews: They are now the Accursed rather than the Chosen People; they are now a purblind race, spiritually deadened and unable to see the truth of Christianity; their religion is invalid, if anything, an obstacle to the true religion; they are to be dispersed over the face of the earth and undergo various persecutions until the end of history when they will be converted to Christianity as a group. The continuing dispersion and suffering of the Jews may be taken then as a sign of the justice of God and the truth of Catholicism.²⁶ A legitimate conclusion from this view is that persecution of the Jews is a good thing. For example, we find the following decrees (among others) enacted by the Fathers of the Fourth Lateran Council:

²⁵ This is in addition, of course, to their continuing unexpiated guilt resulting from original sin.

²⁶ The State of Israel presented a problem to some Catholics because of this view. To reconcile the State of Israel with their beliefs they held it would be short-lived.

Jews may not appear in public during Easter week; Jews must give tithes on their houses and other property to the Church and pay a yearly tax at Easter; no Christian prince may give an office to a Jew under pain of excommunication; Jews must wear a distinctive dress from their twelfth year to distinguish them from Christians.²⁷

Vatican II instituted the following changes in paragraphs seven and eight, above:

10) (a) While the Jews did not accept Jesus as the Christ, still they are esteemed by God:

As holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews in large number accept the gospel; indeed not a few opposed the spreading of it. Nevertheless, according to the Apostle, the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers,²⁸ for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.²⁹

(b) While certain Jews did urge the death of Christ, nevertheless, all the

²⁷ *DV II*, p. 667, n. 28. The editor adds, "If there was anti-Semitism in these laws, it is . . . repudiated by the Second Vatican Council." I am afraid the Jews feel these decrees exhibit egregious anti-Semitism, and that they served ultimately to encourage and aid Hitler and the Nazis. Their repudiation is always welcome.

²⁸ However, this is not because of any merit on the part of the Jews today. They reject Jesus, whereas the Catholics believe Abraham, Moses, etc., did not and will not.

²⁹ *DV II*, p. 664.

Jews of that time were not guilty, nor are the Jews living today:

True, authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today.³⁰

(c) While the Jews are no longer God's Chosen People, neither are they the Accursed People:

Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy Scriptures.³¹

(d) While Judaism is no longer the true religion, still, the religion of the Old Testament retains a certain degree of historical, pedagogical, and sentimental value:

For 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. . . . The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 665f.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 666.

olive branches of the Gentiles. . . . The Church recalls too that from the Jewish people sprang the apostles, her foundation stones and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ to the world.³²

(e) As a consequence of the above beliefs, persecution of the Jews is repudiated; and in the fullness of time, the Jews will all be converted to Christianity:

The Church repudiates all persecutions against any man. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, she deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source.³³

In company with the prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him with one accord."³⁴

As is apparent, the Second Vatican Council has removed certain pernicious and nonessential beliefs concerning the Jews from traditional Catholic doctrine.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 664.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 666f.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 664f. A note (19) to this passage reads, "A reference to the conversion of the Jews was removed from an earlier version of this Declaration, because many Council Fathers felt it was not appropriate in a document striving to establish common goals and interest first."

The Council has left intact the basic Catholic position: (a) that Jews were involved in the crucifixion of Jesus, one of the persons of the Godhead;³⁵ (b) that Judaism, having been superseded by Christianity, the only true religion, is no longer a saving religion; (c) that the conversion of the Jews to Catholicism, which is presently awaited and hoped for, will be accomplished in the Messianic Age.

In themselves, these beliefs are not socially objectionable;³⁶ a monopoly on truth and salvation is the claim of virtually every orthodox revealed religion. True, such beliefs among the Catholic have often led in the past to objectionable conclusions such as, "All Jews are guilty of deicide," and "God has granted the Church the right to harrass and persecute the Jews." These conclusions have now been disavowed by

³⁵ Those Jews from the point of view of Catholicism, even after Vatican II, are still considered deicides; see *DV II*, p. 666, n. 23. No Jew, of course, believes this proposition is true. There are Jews who, on the basis of the New Testament, believe that some Jews were involved in Jesus' death: (critically speaking, the evidence is not conclusive, and opinions among Jews, as among modern Christians, vary). However, Jews do not believe that God can "die," or that Jesus was part of the Godhead.

³⁶ I.e., objectionable on the grounds that they lead, unnecessarily and unreasonably, to deteriorated social relations. They remain "religiously objectionable" to those who consider them false, as Jews and members of other religions do.

³⁷ E.g., Orthodox Judaism and Sunnite Islam.

Vatican II.³⁸ When carefully followed and scrupulously taught, it may be hoped that these beliefs as presented by Vatican II will not foster anti-Semitism.³⁹ However this may be, because its basic beliefs concerning Judaism are essential to its nature, so long as Roman Catholicism remains itself, it will constitute a direct and explicit polemic against the truth and ultimate value of what it understands Judaism to be.

Having thus examined the pronouncements of Vatican II relating to the Jews, the primary purpose of this discussion, which is the furtherance of dialogue, may be pursued. As defined earlier, the aim of dialogue is twofold,

³⁸ The following editorial comment in *DV II* (p. 665, n. 22) is of interest here: "Some Biblical scholars among the Council Fathers pressed for having on the record a reference to the Gospel accounts that relate involvement of Jewish leaders in the arrest and death of Christ. This involvement has, in fact, been a basic element in the thesis that the Jewish people therefore were guilty of the death of Jesus—a thesis held, and pushed to various consequences, by some Christians from early times to the present. In what follows here, the Second Vatican Council repudiates the thesis and its consequences."

³⁹ I.e., when these beliefs are taught together with the declarations of Vatican II that all Jews today are innocent of deicide, and that hatred and persecution are never justified under any conditions. A prime difficulty appears to be how to teach the Christian story of the Crucifixion to children without "spreading" the negative feelings this teaching prompts against the alleged Jewish deicides of Jesus' time to those who bear the name Jew today. Christian education in some quarters is attempting to deal with this problem.

"mutual understanding" and "respect." Consequently, any difficulty that prevents understanding frustrates completion of the dialogical goal. At this early stage, then, the purpose of dialogue can perhaps best be served by explicating, and hopefully, thereby removing whatever difficulties appear in the path of understanding. I wish to direct attention, therefore, to an obstacle that, as an adherent of liberal Judaism, I find confronts the Catholic dialogist. The nature of this obstacle is mistaken expectation, and the reason for it is that the conception of Judaism which appears in the declarations of Vatican II is fundamentally erroneous. The Catholic who, following the recommendation of Vatican II, enters into dialogue with the contemporary Jew, and who does so on the basis of the Council's teaching, will expect to find Judaism one kind of religious situation when in actuality it is another. The designation of Vatican II's conception as "fundamentally erroneous" bears repetition, for I do not mean that this conception errs in details of belief, but in its fundamental notion of the nature of contemporary Judaism. The total complex referred to today by the name "Judaism" is substantially different from that which the Council conceives it to be. There are two aspects to this misconception; first, that "Judaism" is a monolithic structure consisting of one religious system alone; second, that all Jews and every system of Judaism are in essential agreement with Roman Catholicism on the general principles

of religion.⁴⁰ In point of fact, "Judaism" is the common name given a group of differing religious systems; and several of these systems are in essential disagreement with Roman Catholicism over the general nature of religion in our time.

That Judaism is today the common name for a group of differing religious systems is most readily seen in the fact that there are at least four formally distinct Jewish religious institutions. These are Orthodoxy; Conservatism; Reform; and Reconstructionism. Moreover, adding to the complexity, the latter three institutions are themselves not monolithic, but encompass a spectrum of religious ideas. Many Conservative Jews subscribe virtually to the Orthodox position, others come very near to Reform; some Reform Jews agree closely with Reconstructionism, others favor neo-orthodoxy. It is not possible here to enter in detail upon all the rich variety of beliefs that these institutions produce and embrace. Suffice it to say that the variety is there for the interested student. Still, it is necessary to illustrate at least in part the actual situation of religious pluralism in "Judaism" so that the Catholic dialogist may be helped to understand his many partners in dialogue. I will take, therefore, for this purpose two theological positions widely held today among the Jews. These positions will be interpreted broadly, so that they will

⁴⁰ Not only Catholics, but Christians generally hold this misconception.

include adherents from more than one formal institution. These are the orthodox and rational-liberal positions. The former, as mentioned above, is held by Orthodox Jews and many Conservatives as well, the latter appears mainly among Reform Jews and Reconstructionists.

The Orthodox position includes the following points:

1) The foundation of Judaism is God's revelation to Moses at Sinai. This revelation, the Torah, consists of two parts, the Pentateuch or Written Law, and the Talmud or Oral Law. God authored every word of the Torah, which is on this account absolutely and infallibly true. The Torah expresses God's will for man, and obedience to the Torah brings salvation. In addition to the Torah, there have been minor and supplementary revelations; these are contained in the Prophets and Hagio-grapha. There has not, however, ever been or will there ever be a revelation that supersedes or alters the Torah; the perfect God does not change and revoke the words expressing His divine will and omniscience.

2) The concept of God revealed by the Torah is traditional theism. God is the creator of the universe, omniscient, omnipotent, and self-revealing. God's providence extends to all men, but the Jews are special to him. They are the Chosen People. They were chosen to receive and fulfill the Torah, God's supreme will for man, and to teach other peoples the nature and morality of the true God. As the Chosen People, the Jews enjoy a special providence,

which explains the sufferings and persecutions they have undergone. God demands more of his chosen ones, who often bear the guilt of the entire world. At the end of time the ordinary course of history will come to an end, and God will produce his awaited salvation. The Jews, having subscribed to the true faith, will be particularly favored at this time, but the righteous of all nations will be saved as well.

3) Salvation is eternal life and bliss in the World-to-Come. It is attained by a Jew through obeying the divine commandments of the Torah. Other religionists acquire salvation through obeying the rules of common morality or natural law. There are no innate obstacles to salvation. Man is born innocent, with the freedom of will to choose between good and evil. If man should choose evil and sin, there is no need for an intercessor to plead his case with God. Man himself has the power of atonement necessary to ask for and receive the divine forgiveness.

4) The final salvation of man will be ushered in at the end of history by the Messiah. There will be a general resurrection and the righteous will abide forever in the World-to-Come.⁴¹ The Messiah has not yet arrived; his coming is still awaited.

When the beliefs of Orthodoxy are

⁴¹ This is only one of several versions of the afterlife in Orthodoxy. These versions all agree on resurrection and a Messianic Age, there are differences regarding details, however.

compared with those of Catholicism, the fundamental agreement between them on the general principles of religion is apparent. The foundations of religion for both are infallible, verbal revelations from God; the concept of God as a self-revealing person is likewise shared; also the concept of salvation as a personal after-life; and too, the belief that ordinary history will come to an end with the advent of a Messiah. The differences consist in details of belief.⁴² Orthodox Judaism maintains the Mosaic revelation is true forever; Catholicism admits the Mosaic revelation, but claims it has been superseded by the New Testament, which in turn is true forever. Orthodoxy maintains the theistic Godhead consists of one person; the Catholic argues that the theistic Godhead consists of three persons. Orthodoxy believes eternal life comes through man's own power by obeying the Torah; Catholicism says eternal life can only come through the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ. Orthodoxy says the Messiah has not yet come; Catholicism contends he has. These details are the differences that have traditionally been understood to constitute the distinction between Orthodox Judaism and Catholicism. This is seen when the issues that occupied the Jews and Catholics in the great disputations of the Middle Ages are ex-

⁴² I.e., these are details from the viewpoint of philosophy of religion in its general classification of religions. To the religionists involved these details may, quite properly, be considered essential and saving differences.

amined.⁴³ At the famous disputation in 1263 at Barcelona, between Nahmanides and Pablo Christiani, the issues in question were whether the Messiah had yet appeared, and whether the Messiah according to Scripture is a divine or human being.⁴⁴ At Tortosa in 1413-14, a disputation held at the command of the antipope Benedict XIII (Pedro de Luna), the issue was whether Jesus could be proved the Messiah on the basis of the Talmud.⁴⁵ It

⁴³ The closest Judaism ever came to being monolithic was perhaps during the Middle Ages. Orthodox Judaism dominated the religious life of the Jews. However, even then, other systems, such as that of Maimonides' speculative theology, were firmly present.

⁴⁴ Orthodox Judaism believes the Messiah is only human; Catholics, of course, believe he is divine, part of the Godhead. There was a sad aftermath to this disputation. Nahmanides was forced into exile to flee the wrath of the Dominicans. Disputations, together with the coercion, fear, and persecution that often accompanied them, are now repudiated by Vatican II. Dialogue, with its spirit of respect, replaces the disputation.

⁴⁵ The Talmud, which makes some disparaging remarks about non-Jewish religions, was often attacked in the Middle Ages. These remarks were not doctrinal, but simply asides. Nevertheless, the Talmud was often condemned, e.g., after the disputation at Tortosa, study of the Talmud was prohibited. Often it was consigned to the flames. The issue of the Talmud is still alive for some Catholics. We read the following comment to the text of the Declaration concerning the Jews, "Cardinal Ruffini, Archbishop of Palermo, (requested) that Christians should love Jews, and Jews should declare they will not hate Christians (and he asked that certain passages in the Talmud be corrected)." *DV II*, p. 665, n. 20.

seems reasonable to conclude that Vatican II envisaged that the form the dialogue it proposed between Jew and Catholic would take would be substantively similar to that of the medieval disputation.⁴⁶ Each religion, in agreement on a verbal revelation (the Bible or Old Testament) and basic religious concepts, would discuss different interpretations of an infallible text. But if the primary differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism can be exhausted in a medieval-styled dialogue over details, such is not the case with regard to the differences between Catholicism and rational-liberal Judaism. Here the differences are deep and fundamental, reflecting the profound cleavage between the medieval and contemporary periods of religious expression.

The position of rational-liberal Judaism, by virtue of the freedom ("liberalism") inherent in it, does not lend itself easily to generalization. Nevertheless, virtually all liberals share certain principles in common, and I will attempt to present them in the following summary:

1. The foundation of rational-liberal Judaism can be described as a negation—the denial that the Bible is an absolute or infallible verbal revelation from God.⁴⁷ Some liberals consider the Bible

⁴⁶ I.e., without the accidental negative elements.

⁴⁷ The Jewish religious liberal, despite the fact he does not consider the Bible (Old Testament) infallible revelation still feels it is worthy, because of its general religious eminence, history and influence, of being called the *Bible*, i.e., the Book. For the lib-

partially revealed or inspired, others think it entirely the work of man.⁴⁸ Whichever position is taken, all liberals agree there is no way to decide authentically what is true in Scriptures except through individual and private decision. Accordingly, authoritarianism is repudiated in liberal religion. The liberal religionist takes decision-making upon himself as part of the responsibility of freedom. The narratives of the Pentateuch which describe an oracular and miracle working deity, from the story of creation and Eden, through the Sinaitic revelation, to the death of Moses are taken as largely mythological. There is substantial agreement, however, regarding the essential correctness of the ethical casuistry of the prophets,⁴⁹ particularly such pre-exilic prophets as Amos and First Isaiah. Although the Pentateuch is understood as substantially mythological, it, and other traditional Jewish religious works, such as the Talmud, serve as rich sources of

eral, the New Testament does not continue the development of the Bible that would have been proper, namely, to an even more reasonable view of God and the universe. The Christian liberal, however, does find value in the New Testament.

⁴⁸ The Talmud is considered entirely the work of man.

⁴⁹ Casuistry is the application of general ethical principle to particular cases. Thus the liberal almost always agrees with the concrete decisions of the prophets regarding particular instances of "good" and "bad"; the liberal does not, however, feel that the source of these decisions is a literal revelation from God.

symbolism, ceremonial, and religious language. The Jewish religious liberal sees himself as part of the continuing biblical and traditional Jewish quest for religious authenticity. Scriptures and other traditional writings are understood critically, as constituted of a series of different documents reflecting the ongoing evolution and development of man. This evolution and development the liberal continues. To the Jewish liberal, the notion of an infallible, unchanging revelation goes with a static view of God and the universe. He rejects this for the *Weltanschauung* of a dynamic divinity behind a truly evolving cosmos. The system of Judaism to which the liberal subscribes is open to change. For this reason he does not feel the essence of this form of Judaism will ever be superseded, not because significantly new religious ideas never arise, but because the open religious system can embrace and absorb them as they do.

2. There is no one concept of God subscribed to in rational-liberal Judaism. Non-theistic as well as theistic theologies have been advanced. Such concepts as the finite God (personal and impersonal), pantheism and panentheism find favor. A number of liberals are also greatly influenced by logical empiricism. While the specifics of their theologies differ, at times considerably, some theological generalizations relevant to our theme may be drawn from liberal religious thought. Divine providence is not to be found in the miracu-

lous intervention of deity into human affairs, but in the "ordinary" or "natural" potentialities for good that are available to human realization. No one group is arbitrarily chosen by deity for a special task or for special love. All who do the good are "chosen people." The concept of the Chosen People as it appears literally in Scriptures is taken as mythological.

3. The concept of salvation also varies in rational-liberal Judaism. Resurrection is universally rejected, although a number affirm the immortality of the soul. Many liberals, in agreement with biblical Judaism, reject the notion that there is a religiously significant afterlife. Salvation is a state to be found and enjoyed in this life. The primary obstacle to salvation is not sin, but the finite condition of man which makes him subject to anxiety and death. Different paths to salvation are proposed, but salvation itself may be described as a state of "intrinsically meaningful personal being."⁵⁰

4. Liberals, generally, hope and work for a stage of human history that is termed by some the Messianic Age. The concept of a supernatural and miraculous end to ordinary history through the agency of a person, human or divine,

⁵⁰ I.e., a state of human being which in itself, without reference to a life beyond, provides adequate reason for human existence. See my article, "Shabbat as a State of Being" (*Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis*, January, 1967), particularly pp. 37f.

who is the Messiah, is rejected by the religious liberal. The Messianic Age will be ushered in by man through the realization of the ever-present divine potential for goodness. Scientific, technological, and political advance are as necessary for the Messianic Age as are religious and spiritual progress.

In conclusion, I must repeat my hope that the discussion presented here will help clarify to some extent the theoretical differences that exist between Roman Catholicism and contemporary "Judaism." In this way, I believe, the avowed aims of dialogue, understanding and respect, can best be served. For true understanding and respect cannot arise except through genuine communication, and the latter takes place only in a meeting between those who see and accept one another in their concrete actuality. Dialogue, in a sense, is easier for the Liberal than for the Orthodox or Catholic religionist. By the very fact that he does not possess absolute and infallible truth, the Liberal finds himself open to the claims of truth made by others; it is less natural to give a hearing to other viewpoints when one believes himself in possession of all ultimate and final knowledge. Moreover, the Catholic has preconceived beliefs essential to his faith about the nature of Jews and Judaism; these dogmas must not be allowed to obscure the actual religious life and beliefs of the contemporary Jew with whom he engages in dialogue.

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REINES: LIBERAL JUDAISM AND VATICAN II

(Continued from Page 58)

There can be little question that profound differences exist between much of Judaism and Roman Catholicism, but the ethical base of the call for dialogue points to a great and transcending truth: It is not necessary for men to

believe together in order to live together as it is not necessary for them to affirm the truth of one another's beliefs in order to affirm the value of one another's existence.