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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Paris Office: 30, Rue La Boetie, Paris 8, France • Elysees 69-11, 83-63 • Cable: Wishcom, Paris • Zachariah Shuster, European Director

March 12, 1963

MEMORANDUM

To: David Danzig

From: Z. Shuster

Subj: Meeting with Cardinal Bea

I should like to put down here my reactions to the proposed list of "Questions to be Submitted to Cardinal Bea at the Meeting with Jewish Scholars" which you were good enough to send me.

Points A & B of article I aim at a denial of the traditional charges against Jews in connection with the origin of Christianity; while point C asks for acceptance of Jews. And this is all, in this paper, that concerns directly Christian/Jewish relations, for article 2 presents rather a general request for a declaration on human rights and equality; article 3 is really a request for implementation which is probably not within the competence of the Ecumenical Council itself, but of the permanent ecclesiastic bodies which will be created afterwards in order to carry out the Council decisions; and article 4 is another request for a positive implementation which is probably also not within the competence of the Ecumenical Council proper.

I feel that the first two articles which deal with the central topic need to be given more content and weight. In addition to the request for a rejection of the negative, a general declaration on Christian/Jewish relations ought to be inspired by the spirit of a positive attitude toward Jews and Judaism, both ancient and contemporary; that Jews and Judaism have made permanent contributions to civilization, and that Judaism and Christianity share in common tremendous treasures of beliefs and attitudes which form the essence of civilization in large parts of the world.

It should be noted that in recent decades some recognized Catholic authorities who have reviewed relations between Christianity and Judaism have come to the conclusion that anti-Semitism and the religious grounds upon which it is allegedly based, is not only evil and false but contrary to the very spirit and basis of Christianity itself.

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To cite only a few examples, the well known Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac, who is a member of the Ecumenical Council, in a book published in 1949 says:

"In the Jew it is we, Christians, that have been persecuted. If his (the Jews') adversaries were victorious, our faith would have been destroyed...The blasphemies thrown at the faith of Israel and against its historical role would have hit our very hearts. Therefore, as long as anti-Semitism will remain a threat, the Church will not cease to encourage us to struggle, and it will not put away the weapons of the spirit."

(H. de Lubac, Affrontements Mystiques, Edition of Témoignage Chrétien, Paris, 1949, p. 11 and p. 126.)

In the same spirit, on p. 96 of the same book, Father de Lubac continues:

"What would remain of our Christian faith if one removes monotheism, the Ten Commandments, universalism and the belief in eternity? The demand for a definitive recognition of living Judaism thus rests on authoritative Christian theological sources. This demand is based on the principle that the relations between the Church and the Jewish people are different in nature than those between the Church and the world which is foreign to the election, to the revelation and biblical history. These relations are based on their common roots, common biblical patrimony, their convergent hopes which bind them in the unity of the work of God. They are not without similarity with the relationship between the Catholic Church and the separated Christians. They must be approached in an Ecumenic spirit and with methods similar to those which are more and more utilized to promote unity among Christians.

The well known Jesuit and professor at the Roman Pontifical Biblical Institute, J. Bonsirven, has this to say in an authoritative Catholic Encyclopedia, Catholicism Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow:

"Hypothetically, a Christian should never refuse anyone the title of neighbor. And how can a brother in blood of Jesus and of Mary not be the neighbor of the Christian? Let us be reminded of the admirable saying of Léon Bloy: 'Anti-Semitism is the most terrible blow that our Lord has received in his Passion, which is still lasting. This is the most bloody and impardonable blow because he received it on the face of his mother and by the hand of Christians.'" (Art. Anti-Semitism, col. 662, Paris, 1948.)

Leading Catholic theologians in recent decades have also come out in favor of a fundamental recognition of contemporary Judaism. Here is what Father J. Bonsirven has to say on the subject:

"In every fashion equally we see Judaism, considered as a whole, unceasingly developing and ever acquiring new strength. It has resisted all attempts at absorption and all that makes for dissolution, and continues to grow in numbers; a unique example in the history of nations. This perpetuity, despite hostile conditions, is for us a pledge that Israel remains the eternal people. Must we not see in this perpetuity and constant development the will and secret design of Providence? What does God mean yet to do

with this people which he has chosen and heaped with his gifts?
(J. Bonsirven, On the Ruins of the Temple - Judaism after our Lord's Time, Engl. translation London, 1931.

These and many other statements that could be cited from Catholic theologians, prove that what is sought by many Christian thinkers is a rapprochement with Jews and Judaism in a most positive spirit and based on the firm belief that both religions share values of fundamental importance and that the relationship in the future must be grounded in a realization of the joint patrimony of common beliefs in those values without which each religion would be removed from its very foundation.

A strong argument in support of the thesis that a mere rejection of the negative is insufficient is that the Catholic Church has condemned anti-Semitism on several occasions in the past, one such condemnation having been made in a decree issued by the Holy Office in 1928. And yet these condemnations have had very little effect either on the teaching of Christianity or on the behavior of large masses of people who nominally adhere to Christianity.

One is therefore entitled to state that a real revolutionary change can take place only when the Catholic Church expresses its change of attitude in definite positive terms.

The questions posed in articles 2, 3 and 4 can be also discussed with the Cardinal. But, in my opinion, concentrated efforts must be made on the contents of the fundamental declaration; and I have no doubt that this approach is well known to Cardinal Bea and has his sympathy.

It is possible that some of the Orthodox and Conservative members of the group may object to an emphasis on the common positive values of Judaism and Christianity. However, even if not too much stress is laid on this point in theological terms, the value of a statement by the Ecumenical Council which would recognize the intrinsic qualities of Judaism would be of inestimable importance.