

**Private Communication  
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**THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S**

**DECLARATION ON THE JEWS**

**A Background Report**

The American Jewish Committee  
Institute of Human Relations  
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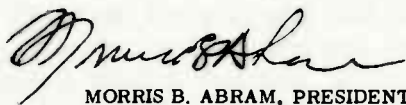
## Preface

The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church has repudiated the ancient charge of collective Jewish guilt in the death of Jesus.

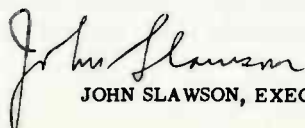
The declaration -- the fruit of years of effort -- is not an end but a beginning. It cannot obliterate with one stroke the issues that have too often stood between the two faiths in the past; indeed, it deals less decisively with some of these issues than its supporters had hoped. Nevertheless, there is every reason to expect that the measure will open the door to an era of vastly improved relationships between Catholics and Jews.

Far-reaching self-examination within the Church led to the epoch-making move. In the process, Church leaders repeatedly turned to non-Catholic sources for information and exchange of views. The American Jewish Committee was one group so involved; its most important activities in this field are included in the present report.

Whatever we of the American Jewish Committee may have contributed is due to many persons, including Jewish scholars and theologians, as well as our own officers, members and professional staff. Our lay leaders tirelessly took part, carrying out many crucial tasks. Their devotion and statesmanship will remain indispensable in the even greater undertaking ahead: to transform the widening opportunities for interreligious understanding into realities.



MORRIS B. ABRAM, PRESIDENT



JOHN SLAWSON, EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT

Official Summary of the Statement on the Jews  
in the Vatican Council's Declaration  
on Non-Christian Religions  
(Voted October 14-15, 1965)

The Council searches into the mystery of the Church and remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Testament to Abraham's stock.

The Church acknowledges that according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the Patriarchs, Moses and the Prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ--Abraham's sons, according to the faith--are included in Abraham's call. The Church cannot forget that she received the Revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His ineffable mercy concluded the ancient Covenant.

Indeed, the Church believes that by His Cross, Christ our Peace reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.

The Church recalls that Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, as well as most of the early Disciples sprang from the Jewish people.

Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation, nor did the Jews, for the most part, accept the Gospel; indeed, many opposed its spreading.

Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of the Fathers; His gift and call are irrevocable. In company with the Prophets and Paul the 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 shoulder to shoulder."

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is so great, the Council wants to foster and recommend a mutual knowledge and respect which is the fruit, above all, of Biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

Although the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ, nevertheless what happened to Christ in His Passion cannot be attributed to all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor to the Jews of today.

Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this follows from Holy Scriptures.

May all see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in preaching the Word of God, they do not teach anything that is inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel and with the spirit of Christ.

Moreover the Church, which rejects every persecution against any man, mindful of the common patrimony with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, deploras hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

As the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His Passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the Cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

Statement by the American Jewish Committee on the  
Adoption of the Vatican Council's Declaration  
(October 15, 1965)

The Vatican Council Declaration on the Jews has been awaited with hope by men of goodwill everywhere. We regret keenly some of the assertions in the Declaration, especially those that might give rise to misunderstandings.

Nevertheless, we view the adoption of the Declaration, especially its repudiation of the invidious charge of the collective guilt of Jews for the death of Jesus and its rejection of anti-Semitism, as an act of justice long overdue. We trust the Declaration will afford new opportunities for improved interreligious understanding and cooperation throughout the world.

Much will depend on the manner and vigor with which the affirmative principles embodied in this Declaration will be carried out. Consequently, we are heartened to learn of the creation of a special Commission on Catholic-Jewish Relations by the American hierarchy.

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## **Introduction**

On October 14 and 15, 1965, the Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church, assembled in Rome at the fourth and final session of the Second Vatican Council, approved by an overwhelming majority a declaration on "The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," with its long-awaited statement on the Jews. On October 28, the document was promulgated by Pope Paul VI, and became part of official Catholic doctrine, binding on every member of the Church throughout the world.

The declaration acknowledges "the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Testament to Abraham's stock" and affirms the Jewish origins of Jesus, Mary and the Apostles. While noting that most of the Jewish people in Jesus' time did not accept the Gospel, the statement emphasizes that the Jews remain "most dear" to God, whose "gift and call are irrevocable." The text goes on to recommend that mutual knowledge and respect be fostered through theological studies and fraternal dialogues.

Most important, the declaration clearly states that what happened in the Passion of Jesus cannot be attributed to all the Jews of his time, nor to the Jews of today. It stresses that Jews "should not be presented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this follows from Holy Scriptures," and that no one is to teach or preach "anything that is inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel." Indeed, the Church "deplores hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed at Jews at any time and by anyone."

While the declaration as adopted is somewhat less warm and decisive in tone than a tentative text approved in principle at the end of the Council's third session in 1964, it unequivocally rejects one of the most baneful ideas in the history of the Christian world: the teaching that the Jews are a cursed people suffering exile and persecution as a divinely ordained punishment for their alleged collective guilt in the death of Jesus. This misconception, though never an official doctrine of the Church, has been handed down through nearly 2,000 years by parents, teachers, writers, artists and even priests, and has wrought untold misery by providing seemingly authoritative sanction for anti-Semitic hostility.

Indeed, among the manifold causes that underlie the complex phenomenon of anti-Semitism--historical, economic and psychological, as well as religious or pseudo-religious--the myth of the Jewish people as "Christ killers" has proved perhaps the most persistent. It helped prompt the mass murder of European Jews by the Crusaders of the Middle Ages, and the pogroms of Czarist Russia. It contributed to the cultural climate in which the horrors of nazism could occur, and it still reappears periodically on the world scene--most recently in the propaganda of neo-Fascists in Argentina.

### **Reappraisal Within the Church**

The Catholic Church's decision to eradicate the accusation that all Jews are guilty of the death of Jesus is part of a wide reappraisal of Christianity's role in the modern world--a process that has gone on among all denominations for roughly the last two decades.



Since the Second World War, the position of Christianity has radically altered. As former colonial peoples have gained independence, and as great new powers have begun to arise outside the West, the Christian nations have lost the near monopoly of world power they once held. One result is that the Christian faith faces increasingly direct challenges everywhere, by other religions and by the anti-religious creed of communism. At the same time, titanic new forces--the rising economic expectations of developing nations, the racial tensions that beset many countries, the population explosion and the specter of nuclear war--demand new responses from all religious groups.

Roman Catholicism's coming to grips with these tumultuous developments is symbolized in the towering figure of Pope John XXIII. It was he who gave voice and direction to the forces seeking an aggiornamento or modernization program for the Church, and who, in 1959, called the Second Vatican Council as a means toward this end.

The Church thus entered a time of ferment which still continues. "Progressive" clerics have challenged "traditionalists"; hierarchies of various countries have asserted themselves against conservative elements in the Church's central administration in Rome; prelates from multireligious nations have taken issue with those from countries in which the Church enjoys preferred official status. These inner dynamics have astonished those who had previously believed the Church to be an immutable monolith.

In a marked departure from past practice, the Church today is seeking to strengthen her ties with the "separated brethren"--non-Catholic Christian churches--and to establish friendly communication with non-Christian groups. In part, this new concern focuses on relations with the Jews, paralleling current developments in Protestant-Jewish affairs. Biblical studies have provided fresh understanding of the roots of Christianity in Judaism, and have engendered new respect for Judaism as a tradition with a significant message for modern man. Even more important, the holocaust visited upon Jewry in Christian Europe has raised the question how religious concepts and teachings might have contributed to anti-Jewish hostility.

A conference on the persistence of anti-Semitism in Europe, held during 1947 in Seelisberg, Switzerland, in effect framed the agenda for the dawning new era in Christian-Jewish relations. Most of the conference's thinking stemmed from the work of the Jewish historian, Jules Isaac of France, noted for his writings on the religious roots of anti-Semitism. ( Professor Isaac's researches in this field were begun under the impact of the Nazi holocaust, which took the lives of his wife and daughter. )

The conference called on churches to remember "that One God speaks to us all through the Old and New Testaments," and "that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother," as well as to avoid "disparaging ... Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity," "presenting the Passion in such a way as to bring the odium of the killing of Jesus upon Jews alone," or "promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people is reprobate, accursed, reserved for a

destiny of suffering." It was further suggested that the history of the Jews and the "Jewish problem" be handled more sympathetically in teaching the young, and that Christian publications, especially educational ones, be revised in this spirit.

In accordance with the guidelines established at Seelisberg, efforts were made in a number of countries to revise harmful Christian teaching about Jews. In sermons and pamphlets and at meetings, Church authorities denounced anti-Semitism. Associations for Christian-Jewish friendship were launched or revived. But the pace was uneven. Plainly, large-scale improvement was possible only if a revision of the traditional attitude toward Jews and Judaism could be officially incorporated into the Church's teaching.

During the two years following his accession in 1958, Pope John gave repeated indications that the time might be ripe for such decisive action. He entered into searching discussion with Professor Isaac. He ordered certain phrases offensive to Jews, such as *perfidii Iudaei* ("perfidious" or "unbelieving Jews"), stricken from the Holy Week liturgy. Most important, he felt the Second Vatican Council should provide an opportunity for the Church to clarify officially its attitude toward Jews and Judaism, and to repudiate traditions that had too long perpetuated tension and hatred.

## **The American Jewish Committee and the Catholic Church**

As early as the war years, members of the American Jewish Committee's staff worked with Catholic groups in exploring avenues toward better understanding. The Committee's Paris office maintained close contact with Professor Isaac and other European pioneers in combating religious anti-Semitism. At Seelisberg, the Committee's representative took an active part in drafting the recommendations.

In 1952, the American Jewish Committee sought authoritative clarification of the doctrinal status of the deicide charge from a recognized Catholic scholar, Father Louis Hartman, C. Ss. R., General Secretary of the Catholic Biblical Association. In a letter to the Committee, Father Hartman stated that "historically speaking . . . there is no basis for the claim that the Jews [of New Testament times] as a people were guilty of the death of Christ, and obviously there is not the slightest reason for bringing this accusation against their descendants."

Five years later, the Committee called upon the Vatican to take action against increasing anti-Jewish manifestations among Catholics in Poland. During the same year, a Committee delegation was received by Pope Pius XII; on this occasion, the Pontiff issued a widely noted statement calling on the world's nations to open their doors to the victims of persecution.

The American Jewish Committee has long been identified with research in religious education, particularly on certain problems eventually dealt

with in the Vatican decree on the Jews. As early as 1932, the Committee provided the impetus for a long-term pioneer program under which Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religious educators in the United States reviewed their instruction materials and teaching practices for prejudice-producing elements. These self-studies, begun at Drew University, have been continued at various academic centers until the present.

Findings of a massive study of Protestant textbooks, carried out at the Yale Divinity School by the Rev. Bernhard E. Olson, were published as a book (Faith and Prejudice) in 1963; results of a parallel survey of Catholic religious texts, prepared by Sister M. Rose Albert Thering, O.P., at St. Louis University, were released in preliminary form during 1964. At the initiative of Father Bertrand de Margerie, S.J., Executive Director of the Brazilian National Conference of Catholic Priests, a study of Catholic texts used in Brazil was undertaken a few years ago with the Committee's help. An inquiry into Jewish teaching materials has been pursued at Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning under the direction of Dr. Bernard D. Weinryb.

These efforts have been supplemented by programs conducted directly with Catholic educators. Today, a representative of the American Jewish Committee acts as a consultant to certain Catholic agencies in the preparation of religious textbooks, helping give a true picture of the Jews, their religion, history and culture. Members of the Committee's staff also serve as guest lecturers at training institutes for Catholic teaching orders and at seminaries.

In addition, popular understanding of Catholic-Jewish relations is fostered through the Committee's publications and information services. This awakened interest has brought forth numerous articles on the subject in newspapers, general magazines, Jewish periodicals and Catholic diocesan journals. Spokesmen of the Committee have been frequently chosen to represent Jewish views in interfaith programs on radio and television.

On the foreign scene, the American Jewish Committee has pioneered in establishing civic friendship organizations, such as the new Jewish-Christian confraternities in several South American countries and the Amistad group in Spain.

In the academic field, the Committee collaborates with the International University for Social Studies "Pro Deo" in Rome--an independent Catholic-sponsored institution--to further study and training in human relations. A chair has been endowed and a human-relations study center established there; pilot studies of Italian and Spanish Catholic teaching about other faiths are in process.

While cooperating in given areas of agreement with Catholic and other religious groups, the American Jewish Committee has, of course, never hesitated to voice differences of opinion. Thus, the Committee has taken issue with spokesmen of various organizations over problems of the separation between church and state. When individuals associated with religious bodies seemed to condone anti-Semitism, the Committee has taken a stand--protesting, for example, the support recently given by certain priests to anti-Jewish agitation in Argentina. In the same



spirit, the Committee has encouraged wide dissemination of objective historical research on the roles played by religious institutions in world events--for example, on the failure of German Catholics to condemn unequivocally the Nazis' anti-Semitic excesses (Guenter Lewy, "Pius XII, the Jews and the German Catholic Church: A Documented Study," Commentary, February 1964).

In keeping with its longstanding concern for the advancement of interreligious understanding, the Committee wholeheartedly welcomed the opportunities afforded by the Ecumenical Council for reexamining relationships among the faiths. Besides providing the appropriate Council commission, by invitation, with documented information bearing on the proposed declaration about the Jews, the Committee also exchanged viewpoints with numerous members of the Catholic hierarchies in various countries. At different times, contacts were established with nearly all cardinals in the Americas, as well as with many other influential prelates and periti (Council experts) on both sides of the Atlantic.

### **The Research Memoranda**

During the preparatory phase of the Vatican Council, the American Jewish Committee, at the request of Church authorities, submitted detailed research data documenting the presence of anti-Jewish elements in Catholic teaching and liturgical writings, and suggesting steps toward better understanding between the two faiths.

That such documentation would be useful was established through consultations with numerous advisors in the Americas and Europe. Scholars representing the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform branches of Jewry were continually consulted before and during prepara-

tion, so that the memoranda in their final form reflected a wide range of responsible Jewish thought. At the same time, the views of many Catholic and Protestant experts were sought. These consultations impressively demonstrated the concern of churchmen with the problems to which the Committee was addressing itself.

The task of drafting a statement on Catholic-Jewish relations for action by the Ecumenical Council had been assigned to the Vatican's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, presided over by the renowned Jesuit scholar, Augustin Cardinal Bea. From the outset, the venerable Cardinal, with his passion for justice and his keen sense of history, proved himself one of the great figures of the aggiornamento. The American Jewish Committee soon entered a period of fruitful discussion with him--a working relationship which was to continue through the Council sessions.

During July 1961, in the first of a long series of audiences with Committee representatives, Cardinal Bea requested that a memorandum on anti-Jewish elements in present-day Catholic religious instruction be sent to him at once, to be followed by a similar presentation on passages derogatory to Jews in Catholic liturgical materials and literature. The desired documents were submitted in the summer and fall of that year.

The first memorandum, entitled The Image of the Jew in Catholic Teaching, drew heavily on the textbook studies with which the Committee had so long been involved. The document cited and analyzed hostile references to Jews as a group (e.g., "the bloodthirsty Jews," "the blind hatred of the Jews"); unfair comparisons between Judaism and



Christianity ("The Jews believed that one should hate an enemy; but Christ taught the opposite"); failure to acknowledge the Jewish roots of the Christian religion ("The world must thank the Catholic Church for the Bible"); and partiality shown in identifying the enemies of Jesus as Jewish ("The Jews decided to kill him"), while ignoring the fact that his friends also were Jews ("Jesus was held in great admiration by the people"). Most important, the memorandum quoted numerous references to the Jews as an accursed nation of deicides ("Him also [Jesus] they put to death. Because of this fact, they were finally rejected by God...").

The companion memorandum, Anti-Jewish Elements in Catholic Liturgy, again focused mainly on the deicide accusation. It acknowledged the recent removal of anti-Jewish expressions from the liturgy, but went on to emphasize that prejudiced material remained in certain texts, particularly those read in churches during Holy Week, and in commentaries on the liturgy prepared for the use of the faithful.

Passages cited described the Jews collectively as bloodthirsty killers of Jesus (e.g., "As if frenzied by a delirious fever ... they hit upon the plan to do away with him"), or as rejected and deservedly persecuted ("A curse clings to them"; "Cain-like, they shall wander fugitives on the earth ... Slavery, misery and contempt have been their portion"). After recalling the fate of European Jewry under Hitler, the document closed with the request that the Church find ways of rectifying liturgical passages which "stimulate and reinforce the slanderous concept of the Jews as a cursed, despised, deicide people."

The American Jewish Committee felt that these critical studies should be supplemented with positive suggestions for the betterment of Catholic-Jewish understanding. In an audience with Cardinal Bea, it was agreed that a leading Jewish theologian was to draw up a set of recommendations for the use of the Cardinal's staff. The offer was welcomed, and the promised document was submitted in the spring of 1962.

This third memorandum, On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations, suggested that a start be made with a Council declaration recognizing the "integrity and permanent preciousness" of the Jews as Jews (rather than as potential converts), condemning anti-Semitism and explicitly rejecting the deicide charge. Beyond this initial step, the proposal foresaw such measures as the creation of a permanent high-level commission at the Vatican to watch over Catholic-Jewish relations and take the lead in combating prejudice; official Church encouragement for cooperation in civic and charitable endeavors; and joint research projects and publications.

Thus, during the Council's planning stage, the American Jewish Committee documented certain crucial points then under consideration by the Church.

## Setting the Stage

Throughout 1962, Christian-Jewish relations became the object of increased public attention-- partly because of the approaching Ecumenical Council, partly because the Protestant World Council of Churches, at a meeting in New Delhi in December 1961, had vigorously condemned anti-Semitism, with the specific recommendation that "the historic events which led to the Crucifixion should not be so presented as to fasten upon the Jewish people of today responsibilities which belong to our corporate humanity."

Articles on deicide and related questions now appeared frequently in the Catholic press and elsewhere. To help stimulate discussion, the American Jewish Committee's French-language magazine, Evidences, devoted part of several issues to an extended symposium in which leading Catholic and Protestant scholars and churchmen from various European countries set forth their ideas on Christian teaching about Jews. It was the first such exposition of views in any European publication.

The American Jewish Committee also participated in a widely applauded interreligious activity, sponsored by Pro Deo University: a series of agapês or fraternal banquets devoted to the discussion of social and civic concerns among religious leaders and laymen of different faiths. At an agapê held in Rome during January 1962, no fewer than 16 religious groups, the largest number to date, were represented. High-ranking Vatican personalities attended; Cardinal Bea led the guests in a non-denominational prayer and called on "all groups of

mankind to overcome the hatreds of the past." The Committee was the only Jewish organization from abroad that was invited to address the gathering; the Committee's spokesman described the hopes aroused among Jews and others by the forthcoming Council, which he characterized as a unique occasion to reemphasize the brotherhood of man.

Meanwhile, vigorous opposition to the proposed Jewish declaration was making itself heard. In the Church, the opponents were conservative-minded prelates, many of whom questioned the very idea of an Ecumenical Council. Presumably, these forces would want only a non-committal statement, perhaps on non-Christian religions generally.

Outside the Church, similarly strong opposition prevailed in the Arab world, on the grounds that any move favorable to Jews might be interpreted as beneficial to Israel. From the outset, Arab nations fought the decree through diplomatic pressures and propaganda; there were warnings of possible reprisals against the Church in certain Middle Eastern countries if it were enacted.

Thus, the issue was embroiled from the start both in the Church's internal struggle over the aggiornamento and in international politics. But, for the time being, hostile pressures remained without effect, and Cardinal Bea went on with his work. Moreover, in the procedural controversies that took up most of the Council's opening session during the fall of 1962, the progressives were rapidly finding their strength. Thus it appeared certain that the decree on the Jews would be among the issues to be acted on at the second session, scheduled to start in September 1963.

## Cardinal Bea in America

In the winter and spring of 1963, the American Jewish Committee sent several delegations to Rome, for further discussion with Cardinal Bea and other churchmen. In addition, a unique exchange of viewpoints was held with the Cardinal in this country.

Late in March, Cardinal Bea visited Harvard University, where he presided over a Catholic-Protestant colloquium. He then went on to New York for an interfaith civic agapê in his honor--a brotherly gathering attended by high United Nations officials, noted political figures and leaders of the world's major faiths, including Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, who was Cardinal Bea's host on his American trip. The American Jewish Committee provided substantial assistance in the planning and conduct of the event.

The afternoon before the agapê, the Cardinal and two of his staff members met in private conference with a group of prominent Jewish religious and communal leaders to consider problems linked with the proposed decree. The meeting--his only encounter with a representative group of Jewish spokesmen during his American tour--was arranged by the American Jewish Committee and held at its Institute of Human Relations.

The conferees, though attending as individuals, were connected in leading capacities with such organizations as the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Rabbinical Assembly of America, the Synagogue Council of America, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and Yeshiva University. Repre-

sentatives of Pro Deo--including its President, who had been instrumental in arranging Cardinal Bea's visit to the United States--also took part in the discussion, as did ranking officers of the American Jewish Committee.

As a basis for discussion, questions had been prepared beforehand and answered by Cardinal Bea in writing. The agenda reflected much of the American Jewish Committee's thinking on the significance of the deicide concept; on the urgent need for combating anti-Semitism among Catholics; on the importance of having biased teachings officially rejected; and on the desirability of interreligious cooperation.

The Cardinal opened his statement with several theological arguments by which the deicide accusation might be refuted within the framework of Catholic dogma. First of all, he said, the death of Jesus was not the work of Jewry as a whole, but merely of certain Jewish individuals--and even they were forgiven by Jesus. Secondly, St. Paul had explicitly condemned the idea that God had rejected the Jews. And finally, the Diaspora was by no means evidence of Divine punishment, as had been held by some; on the contrary, it had served the Divine purpose by helping to bring monotheism to the world.

The Cardinal then turned to the first of the questions prepared for him: whether the Council could explicitly reject the idea that the Jews are an accursed people guilty of deicide. He assured his listeners that this issue figured large in the draft being prepared by his Secretariat, together



with the recognition of Judaism as a living religion in its own right, and of Christianity's roots in the Old Testament.

Other points raised were whether the Council could condemn unjust allegations and imputations about religious, racial or other groups generally; and whether dogmas and moral principles in this sphere might be translated into concrete regulations through Council action. Cardinal Bea stated that the Council could combat unjust generalizations by laying down guidelines enjoining justice, truth and love toward all human groups; but practical application of these principles would presumably be governed by the Church's day-to-day teaching, preaching and confessional practice, rather than by specific Council action. He closed with the observation that his views were endorsed by Pope John.

### **The Second Session**

Under the influence of John XXIII and thanks to his quiet diplomacy, the tide continued to run strongly in favor of a clear, meaningful decree on the Jews. But on June 4, 1963, Pope John died, his work hardly begun; and even though his spirit continued to be felt under the new Pontiff, Paul VI, the decree was soon to face serious obstacles.

On September 29, the second session opened. It soon became apparent that, contrary to earlier expectations, no quick decisions were likely. Meanwhile, the contents of the prospective declaration on the Jews became public through the press. On October 17, a front-page article in The New York

Times stated that the draft--part of a schema on ecumenism--would acknowledge the Jewish roots of the Church, reject the idea that the Jews rather than all mankind were to blame for Jesus' death, and vigorously repudiate anti-Semitism. The American Jewish Committee promptly voiced the hope that the proposed measure would "represent an historic breakthrough," and that the Council might "finally do away with the epithet 'Christ-killer,' which was hurled upon Jews in so many countries in the past and present."

Objections soon came from conservative elements, especially the tradition-minded Italian bishops, and from prelates of the Arab world. The United Arab Republic also intervened. As controversy mounted, the American Jewish Committee took steps to underscore to appropriate authorities within the Church the hopes and expectations aroused by the Council among Jews and others the world over. In addition, European and South American groups close to the Committee were encouraged to send similar messages to a number of prelates.

Under instructions from Pope Paul, the draft was finally submitted to the assembled Church Fathers on November 8, 1963, as Chapter IV of a schema, or proposed document, on ecumenism--together with a statement on religious freedom, which formed Chapter V. The text was not released to the public, but an official summary stated that the following points were made:

- (1) The Church has its roots in the covenant made by God with Abraham and his descendants.



- (2) The responsibility for Jesus' death lies with all mankind. The part played by Jewish leaders in the Crucifixion cannot be charged to the Jewish people as a whole. The Jews are not deicides nor cursed by God.
- (3) The Church is mindful that Jesus, Mary and the Apostles are descended from Abraham's stock.
- (4) The New Testament accounts of the Crucifixion cannot give rise to hatred or persecution of the Jews. Preachers and catechists are admonished never to present a contrary position, and are urged to promote mutual understanding and esteem.

It was believed that the draft also recommended theological studies and fraternal dialogues designed to foster mutual respect, though this point was not mentioned in the official release. The summary firmly disclaimed any political intent, stressing that the declaration was neither pro-Zionist nor anti-Zionist, and rejecting "any use of the text to support partisan discussions or particular political claims" as wholly contrary to the framers' intention.

When formally introduced to the Council on November 18, the proposed draft drew the session's loudest round of applause. The next day, Cardinal Bea was given a warm and attentive hearing when he stated that the document was drafted at the late Pope John's instructions, and that the history of the Nazi crimes made authoritative action by the Church imperative. A number of prelates warmly endorsed the text on the Council floor--notably, two

high-ranking American clerics, Joseph Cardinal Ritter, Archbishop of St. Louis, and the late Albert Cardinal Meyer, Archbishop of Chicago. A majority of the bishops plainly wished to see the measure adopted; passage seemed assured.

But suddenly, in ways still not entirely clear, the tide turned. The progressive majority found itself unable to bring the matter to a vote. The opposition of Arab prelates and conservatives apparently was augmented at this juncture by churchmen who felt a statement on Jews did not belong in the context of Christian ecumenism, or who objected to the draft on religious freedom which was under consideration at the same time. In the end, the Council recessed on December 2 without having acted on either chapter.

Cardinal Bea remained confident of ultimate success. "What is put off is not put away," he observed. But, in the expressed opinion of the American Jewish Committee, the Council's inaction, coming "at a time of great hopefulness for increased understanding," was "a source of deep disappointment" to Jews and others the world over. At the very least, the two controversial chapters were now liable to basic reconsideration. A period of crises and apprehensions had begun.

### **Cardinal Spellman Speaks**

During the winter and spring of 1964, the prospects took repeated turns for the worse. Proposals were made to shift the decree from Cardinal Bea's jurisdiction to a new Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions. Even more important, it was reported that a revised text then in process contained pas-

sages implying the expectation that the Jews would be converted to Christianity--a development that created consternation in Jewish circles.

As the struggle sharpened, it became evident that the Church's hierarchies in various countries as well as its central administration in Rome would play a decisive role in determining the fate of the decree. That the American bishops overwhelmingly favored a strong declaration had been clear for some time. They now began to play an increasingly active role; eventually, their support was to prove crucial.

In the spring, the dean of American prelates, Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, publicly spoke out. His statement carried especial weight because he chose a Jewish gathering, the American Jewish Committee's Annual Dinner on April 30, as his forum.

Cardinal Spellman was the principal speaker at the event, which also featured U. S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Without referring specifically to the decree (which he regarded as sub judice), the Cardinal made plain where he stood. He declared himself appalled that many Christians still considered anti-Semitism a punishment visited on Jews for their supposed crime of deicide. This idea, he said, was absurd and wholly incompatible with Christianity; prejudice and hatred could never be justified by any religion, and "anti-Semitism can never find a basis in the Catholic religion." In a theological sense, the Cardinal elaborated, all mankind was implicated in the death of Jesus, and the Jews bore no special responsibility or curse. He

added that the Church, far from rejecting its Jewish heritage, happily acknowledged the origins of Christianity in Judaism and the mutual ties of the two faiths.

The address was widely reported in the world press, analyzed in Catholic journals, hailed in editorials and discussed on radio and television panels. The American Jewish Committee had the speech printed as a pamphlet and distributed it extensively in Catholic leadership circles. In the United States, 10,000 copies were sent to the hierarchy and to Catholic educators, social-action agencies and publications; the demand from these quarters soon necessitated a second printing. Comparable quantities, in translation, were distributed in Latin America. Copies also were circulated in Europe through Pro Deo University and the Committee's Paris office.

### **Audience With Pope Paul**

Though the Jewish declaration was finding articulate support among high-ranking prelates, persistent reports simultaneously indicated that efforts were afoot in Rome to empty the measure of meaning by weakening the condemnation of the deicide charge. The American Jewish Committee therefore felt that it was time to seek reassurance from the highest possible authority. Late in May, a Committee delegation was received by Pope Paul.

At the start of the audience, which was conducted in a cordial atmosphere throughout, the Pope read a prepared message. His statement commended the Committee's determination "to safe-

guard the religious and cultural freedom of all people," condemned any curtailment of human rights on racial grounds, acknowledged the intimate links between Christianity and the Judaic tradition, and deplored the sufferings of Jewry in the recent past.

The leader of the delegation turned to the decisive problem, referring to Cardinal Spellman's recent remarks on the subject and voicing the hope that this crucial matter would be acted upon by the Council. The Pope replied: "I have read Cardinal Spellman's speech, and Cardinal Spellman spoke my sentiments."

By way of demonstrating the American Jewish Committee's concern with interreligious relationships, the Pope was then formally notified that a Center for Intergroup Cooperation at Pro Deo University was about to be endowed in memory of a onetime member of the Committee, Leonard M. Sperry, by his widow. The new unit, it was explained, would help promote intergroup harmony through combating prejudice in the teachings of different faiths about one another, as well as through various psychological and sociological research projects.

The Pontiff gave permission for his expressed opinion--his first commitment on the subject--to be publicly circulated, and the Vatican itself gave considerable publicity to the audience.

The text of the Pope's prepared statement was prominently featured in L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican's official organ. In Italy and elsewhere, dailies picked up the story, as did Catholic and Jewish journals. Thus, even though the audience provided no explicit reassurance concerning the declaration, it served to notify Catholics and others the world over that the Church's

highest authority acknowledged the bonds between Christianity and Judaism, and provided a reminder that the Holy See unequivocally condemned hostility against Jews.

### **The Struggle for a Strong Declaration**

The next two weeks revealed how deeply the declaration was in trouble, how justified the American Jewish Committee's misgivings had been. On June 12, The New York Times reported on the contents of the latest version, as outlined by reliable informants. The entire new draft was described as "drastically watered down." Persons at the "highest levels of the Church" were said to have prompted the changes, for political as well as theological reasons, and the chances of amendment from the Council floor were described as slight. The Vatican did not conclusively contradict the Times story.

Deeply disturbed, prelates from the United States and other countries wrote to Rome in protest. Prominent Catholic laymen intervened. Protestant and Jewish leaders, in private communications and in print, expressed their regret. But worse was to follow: Early in the summer there were indications that the decree might not even come up for discussion at the Council's third session.

Throughout these discouragements, the Committee availed itself of every opportunity to present its views to Catholic spokesmen. Thus, late in May, the American Catholic Press Association invited a Committee representative to discuss the decree before more than 400 editors of Catholic publications, gathered at a meeting in Pittsburgh. He spelled out



the changes believed to have been made in the document and pictured the harm they were likely to do to interreligious relationships.

An unprecedented response ensued, with editorials appearing in every major diocesan paper. In a typical statement, The Pilot of Boston declared that the schema on the Jews was "needed badly in our contemporary world" and that it ought "to put at rest for all time those misunderstandings of Christian truths which have on occasion been the roots of anti-Semitism." Reports from authoritative Catholic sources later confirmed that the American Jewish Committee's appeal had made a strong impact.

During this period, the American Jewish Committee reviewed the issue in numerous conferences and exchanges of letters with prelates. In the course of a study tour, a Committee delegation met with high churchmen in Brazil, Argentina and other Latin American countries, and came away greatly encouraged by their attitude. Consultations with members of the hierarchy in the United States and Europe, as well as with persons who knew the thinking of African and Asian prelates, indicated that a substantial majority of the Church Fathers wanted the decree reintroduced, and wanted it to be forceful and decisive.

### **On the Eve of the Third Session**

While these efforts were going forward during mid-1964, the text of the reportedly emasculated decree remained unavailable. But as the summer neared its end, more detailed information indi-

cated beyond doubt that the draft had been totally recast and critically weakened.

On August 24, Cardinal Ritter indicated in an interview that the current version did not explicitly condemn the deicide concept, as the earlier draft had done, but rejected it merely by implication. He added that persons engaged in combating anti-Semitism were perhaps overestimating the significance of the deicide idea in fostering anti-Jewish feeling; yet it was plain that he did not think the current text satisfactory. More forthright wording might be restored on the Council floor, he observed -- a remark which was interpreted by some as a call to action, addressed to the American hierarchy.

On September 3, 1964, the new version of the decree became known to the public through a report in the New York Herald Tribune. As Cardinal Ritter had indicated, there no longer was a forthright denial of the Jews' supposed collective responsibility for the death of Jesus; it had been replaced by a vague warning "not to impute to the Jews of our time that which was perpetrated in the Passion of Christ." Hatred of Jews was reproved as one among many kinds of human wrong, but the special nature of anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews through the centuries were not touched upon.

Moreover, the declaration in this version expressed the hope for an "eventual union of the Jewish people with the Church" -- a thought which could well be taken to mean that acceptance of Jews was contingent on their conversion. No such idea was expressed with respect to Moslems, who were



mentioned elsewhere in the revised document, nor to non-Catholic Christians.

The changes in the text were received with exultation in the Arab press, and with profound disappointment by Jews and others. In a widely quoted statement, the American Jewish Committee acknowledged the Church's right to hope for the eventual Christianization of mankind, but objected to the actively conversionary implications. "Any declaration, no matter how well intended, whose effect would mean . . . the elimination of Judaism as a religion will be received with resentment," the statement asserted.

Most of the West European and North American clergy appeared to want a more vigorous decree, and many Latin American bishops expressed the same wish. It was less clear how strong the counter-pressure from the Curia, the Middle Eastern clergy and certain Irish, Italian and Spanish bishops might become.

### **Varieties of Jewish Opinion**

At this critical juncture, matters were further complicated by differences of opinion within the Jewish community. The question what position Jews should take toward the developments in the Church had stirred controversy earlier in the year. Now, on the eve of the third session, this unresolved issue once more came to the fore.

For many decades, the American Jewish Committee, together with others in the Jewish commun-

ity, had held that clarification of the Church's attitude toward the Jews was a matter of concern to Christendom and Jewry alike, essential to harmonious relations between the two. Since distorted religious teachings, such as the idea of Jewish collective guilt, ranked among the major sources of anti-Semitism, this school of thought maintained that Jewry had a legitimate and practical interest in their official rejection.

A contrary viewpoint had gained considerable currency in Orthodox circles and had also been echoed in certain Conservative and Reform groups. Though at first leaders of all three branches had cooperated with the Committee's activities, a number later came to consider the whole effort--involving, as it did, points of Catholic doctrine--an internal affair of the Church. Jews should at most seek a simple condemnation of anti-Semitism in non-religious terms, it was suggested; they could not properly involve themselves with such matters as the deicide charge and, indeed, were debasing themselves by trying to do so.

The proponents of this viewpoint were prompted largely by concern that any Council statement on Catholic-Jewish relations would seek the conversion of Jews to Christianity--amounting, as a prominent Orthodox spokesman put it, to "evangelical propaganda." As the facts about the revised decree with its apparent reference to conversion became known, these fears seemed increasingly well founded.

Plainly, the public airing of such conflicting views was likely to confuse the issue in the minds of churchmen and provide ammunition for opponents of the decree. With intense effort, a consensus

was finally hammered out in September and was embodied in a resolution signed by 14 Jewish religious and communal organizations. The American Jewish Committee was among them, as were rabbinical groups, including one which earlier had opposed the views implicit in the Committee's activities.

The line of thought expressed in the resolution essentially agreed with the American Jewish Committee's approach. The text opened with a reaffirmation of the Jews' unbreakable commitment to their faith, but went on to say that precisely because of Judaism's traditional concern with the common destiny of man, Jews were participating fully in today's "new dimensions in human relations."

The Jewish community would not seek to offer suggestions on matters of Catholic doctrine, the statement continued; but it was hoped that the Council would further the emerging harmony among the world's religions and "contribute to the effective elimination of anti-Semitism and all sources of bigotry and prejudice," including certain teachings of the Church. The resolution became known to Cardinal Bea's Secretariat and was reported to have been warmly received there.

## **The Principle Affirmed**

As the debate on the Jewish decree approached, the American Jewish Committee bent every effort to communicate its conviction that the new text would damage rather than advance interreligious relations. Letters and memoranda were sent to all 240 American bishops; meetings again were held with many leading American clerics, and views were exchanged with other key members of the European and North and South American hierarchies, either directly or through cooperating Jewish organizations or individuals.

The Vatican Council could do no less, it was emphasized, than was done long ago in the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1545-63), which stated that the Jews could not be singled out for the guilt of Jesus' death. It was also pointed out that expressions of friendship and respect toward Jews would be invalidated by any implication that such feelings were contingent upon hopes of conversion.

Simultaneously, the opponents of the declaration were preparing for the decisive struggle. An attempt was made to distribute the various elements of the text among different schemata--a move which, if successful, seemed certain to preclude conclusive discussion. Arab interests were reported to be readying renewed diplomatic and propaganda pressures.

But the liberals moved rapidly. On September 12, John Carmel Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster and Primate of Great Britain, denounced the changes

in the draft, made, he said, without the approval of Cardinal Bea's Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. On September 17, 170 of the 240 bishops from the United States met in conference and publicly called for a return to the sense of the original chapter. During the following week, leading prelates called on the Pope to plead for discussion of an unemasculated text in full Council.

The draft was introduced to the Council Fathers by Cardinal Bea on September 25, and was finally debated on September 28-29. Cardinal Cushing, who had led the American hierarchy's quest for a strengthened decree, opened the discussion with a powerful address. "In this solemn moment," he declared, "we must cry out: There is no Christian rationale ... for any inequity, hatred or persecution of our Jewish brothers." The speeches that followed betokened an impressive consensus among Church Fathers from all over the world. One after another, prelates from Western Europe and North and South America added their fervent pleas--among them all of the United States Cardinals present.

Altogether, no fewer than 34 Council members from 22 countries rose to speak. Only a small handful defended the weakened draft or objected to any Jewish declaration whatever; an overwhelming majority asked that the text be strengthened. Eyewitnesses were much impressed by the Church Fathers' near-unanimity and determination. At the end of the first day's debate, a well-known theological advisor to the Council told one of the American Jewish Committee's representatives in Rome, with deep emotion: "This was the Council's greatest day,

and a great day for the Church. On no issue have the Fathers been so united; on none have they spoken so forthrightly." A member of Cardinal Bea's staff later said the Fathers evidently wanted a text even stronger than that which had been submitted at the second session.

With this mandate, the draft was returned to Cardinal Bea and his staff, its original intent to be restored before voting. The opposition, however, sought to subject the document to further extended modification, which appeared certain to delay it beyond the adjournment date. On October 9, Cardinal Bea reportedly was asked by a high functionary to surrender the Jewish decree; it was to be reviewed, together with the text on religious liberty, by a mixed commission and annexed to another schema, "On the Nature of the Church."

It soon became evident that this move did not represent the Council majority's wishes. A petition to Pope Paul, signed by 17 leading progressive prelates, including Cardinals Meyer and Ritter, protested the intended change of jurisdiction as a betrayal of the Council's will. From the United States, Cardinals Cushing and Spellman intervened. Under the impact of these protests, the effort to dismember the decree was halted; the text remained essentially in Cardinal Bea's jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, the final text was taking shape. Unlike earlier versions, it encompassed all the great non-Christian religions; but the passages concerning Jews and Judaism closely resembled what Cardinal Bea had proposed in the first place.



Clearly and forcefully, the deicide accusation against Jews past and present was rejected; teachers and preachers were enjoined to spurn ideas that might foster hostility against Jews; increased mutual knowledge and respect among Christians and Jews were recommended; hatred and persecution of Jews, in former days and in our own, were condemned. Hope was voiced for mankind's ultimate religious unity, but the time of such union was said to be "known to God alone." Nothing suggestive of proselytizing in the here and now was said; the permanence of Judaism was in effect acknowledged in the statement that "even though a large part of the Jews did not accept the Gospel, they remain most dear to God."

There remained the struggle to get the decree to the floor for a vote before the closing of the session. Last-minute amendments, printing difficulties and other complications still continued as time ticked away. A vote on the decree concerning religious liberty was finally scheduled for November 19, and on the declaration about non-Christians for November 20, the session's last day. Then, on the scheduled date, the vote about religious liberty was unexpectedly sidetracked. Pandemonium broke loose; more than 1,000 bishops then and there signed a petition requesting Pope Paul "urgently, most urgently" to reverse the ruling; but this the Pope declined to do.

When the text on non-Christians came up for a vote the next day, tension and anxiety rose to a high pitch. But the will of the Council majority was to prevail. The passage dealing with the Jews, for

which Cardinal Bea and his staff had so valiantly fought, was ringingly approved, 1,770 to 185; the declaration as a whole was accepted by a similarly large majority.

### **Toward the Final Session**

Although the overwhelmingly favorable vote constituted an unmistakable expression of Council sentiment in support of the declaration's principles and substance, the text remained open to modification by the prelates until the final, definitive vote at the Council's fourth session. Moreover, the months that followed witnessed a number of discouraging developments.

The Committee's European Office received disturbing reports that the opponents of the declaration were bending every effort to prevent its final adoption. A Lenten homily by Pope Paul, on April 4, 1965, also seemed to bode ill. "The Hebrew People," the Pontiff stated on this occasion, "fought Him (Jesus), slandered Him and in the end killed Him." This imputation of collective guilt met with expressions of disappointment by the American Jewish Committee and numerous other Jewish and non-Jewish groups.

On April 25, a front-page article datelined Rome, in The New York Times, reported that conservative forces were battling the draft on theological grounds, while Arab governments were applying intensive diplomatic pressures. On May 2, the London Observer reiterated these reports, adding that during his journey to India, the Pope had been urged by the Lebanese President, Charles Héluu, to intervene against the draft.



The same articles further asserted that the highest quarters at the Vatican had indicated the text voted on in November 1964 should be modified, both for doctrinal reasons and to protect Catholics in Arab lands. In a departure from normal procedure, the document reportedly had been submitted for revision to an ad hoc committee of four, among them Bishop Luigi Carli of Segni, Italy -- an arch-conservative, who had bluntly argued in a magazine article that the Jews of Jesus' day and those of today did bear collective responsibility for the Crucifixion.

Though the members of the ad hoc committee could not agree on a new text, the reports went on, a majority recommended what was in effect a return to the version of summer 1964, which the Council Fathers had found unacceptable at the third session. Urged by the Pope to produce a unanimous document, the group eventually prepared not an actual text but a set of recommendations which reportedly still left the treatment of the collective guilt of Jesus' Jewish contemporaries ambiguous.

On April 26, the American Jewish Committee publicly expressed "sadness and keen disappointment" at the reports of new stumbling blocks, particularly the Arabs' persistent efforts to politicize the issue, and recalled that in the audience granted to Committee spokesmen during May 1964, less than a year before, the Pontiff had emphatically characterized the Jewish declaration as a purely religious matter.

A few days later (April 29), a related point was stressed by an honorary president of the Committee

at the auspicious dedication of a new building donated to Pro Deo University in Rome by a Jewish-supported American foundation. He urged upon the audience, which included eleven Cardinals on the dais -- among them Amleto Cardinal Cicognani, the Vatican Secretary of State -- the "preservation and implementation" of the declaration's injunction never to present Jews as despised, rejected or guilty of deicide.

On June 20, a report in the London Observer (also carried shortly thereafter in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung) indicated that the Coordinating Commission-- in effect the Council's steering committee -- had been instructed to take the Jewish issue off the fourth session's agenda altogether. Immediately afterwards, however, Archbishop Pericle Felici, the Council's Secretary General, issued a vigorous denial, stressing that the Jewish declaration was on the agenda.

During the period of renewed uncertainty that ensued, prominent members of the American Jewish Committee continued to express urgent concern in their discussions with high-ranking Catholic prelates in the United States, in Europe and in South America. The response was heartening; friendly interest and sympathetic assurances were voiced by numerous churchmen, who emphasized that they would do everything possible to prevent the declaration from being kept off the agenda.

One of the recently elevated Cardinals, a leading figure in the American ecumenical movement with whom the issue had been raised with particular cogency on a number of occasions by an honorary president of the Committee, was to play a crucial role in the Council's final deliberations.

The Committee was also encouraged by discussions with high-ranking Protestant leaders in this country and abroad. Particular concern for the fate of the declaration was expressed in Germany, where the question of anti-Semitism is most closely bound up with the national conscience. At the end of June, the Coordinating Council of the Societies for Christian-Jewish Collaboration in West Germany wrote to all members of the Catholic hierarchy in that country, urging them to exercise their influence in favor of the declaration and referring to a "crisis of confidence" vis-à-vis the Catholic Church.

A month later, the matter was taken up by the 12th annual congress of Germany's Protestant churches, attended by over 20,000 persons. In response to an address by the head of the World Council of Churches, a statement from the congress called on all German Christians, Protestant and Catholic, to "think, speak and act" in the spirit of the proposed declaration, and stressed that the outcome in Rome was vital to Christianity as a whole because "proper understanding and collaboration among Christian churches cannot be had without a new common understanding between Christians and Jews."

Throughout most of 1965, the Committee continued to voice its hopes and fears concerning the declaration in private conversations and in the press, on radio and television. In addition, Committee staff members addressed such varied Catholic leadership groups as the National Workshop on Christian Unity (sponsored by the United States Bishops' Commission on Ecumenism) and the World Congress of the Catholic Press, as well as a number of interfaith and Protestant bodies.

The religious press, both Catholic and Protestant, responded to the crisis with impassioned defenses of the proposed declaration. In the United States, notable pleas appeared in diocesan papers such as the Baltimore Catholic Review, in the Jesuit journal America, in the lay-edited Catholic magazine Commonweal, and, repeatedly, in the Protestant Christian Century and Christianity and Crisis. Learned analyses upholding the proposed declaration as theologically sound were published here by Fathers Gregory Baum in The Ecumenist, Father Dominic M. Crossan in Theological Studies and Dr. Markus Barth in the Ecumenical Journal. Father Rafael Lopez Jordan also discussed the question in Estudios, an Argentine Jesuit magazine read throughout Latin America. In Europe, the issue was kept before the public in an article by a German bishop distributed by the Catholic News Agency, and in such leading newspapers as Le Monde, Figaro and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung.

Just before the opening of the fourth session, additional news about the state of the Jewish declaration began coming through. On September 10, the Italian press agency Ansa, presumably on the basis of an authorized leak from the Vatican, reported that the word "deicide" had been deleted from the draft, in order to do away with "confusions and misunderstandings" that had grown up because of "counter-opposed interpretations" given to the text by Arabs and Israelis.

The actual contents of the pending draft remained secret throughout September, though the general expectation persisted that the text would remain substan-

tially similar to the strong draft approved in principle during the 1964 session. It was learned that the declaration would definitely be presented for final approval and that each of the amendments made since the preliminary vote in 1964 would be voted on individually, according to the normal procedure for Council documents.

### **Days of Decision**

The Council's fourth session opened on September 14 in what was described as a skeptical mood. But pessimism was quickly dispelled when the declaration concerning religious liberty came on the floor. A forthright text, declaring that "in religious matters no one should be forced to act, or prevented from acting, according to his conscience, in private and in public," was approved on September 21 by a majority of 1,997 to 224.

It was assumed that this impressive vote augured well for the declaration on the Jews. Reports from well-informed sources, however, indicated that the declaration on religious liberty had actually been in severe danger from last-minute conservative maneuvers and had been saved only by the unexpectedly vigorous intervention of the Pope himself.

On September 20, the President of the American Jewish Committee stated in a High Holy Day message that adoption of a declaration erasing the stigma of decide from the Jewish people would usher in a new era in Christian-Jewish relations, while failure at this point would cause "a catastrophic setback" for Catholic-Jewish understanding. Meanwhile, a stepped-up propaganda barrage against the declaration was launched by the Arab nations.

On September 30, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity distributed copies of the new statement on the Jews to the bishops and released it officially to the press. The text repudiated the idea of Jewish collective guilt for the death of Jesus: "What happened to Christ in His Passion cannot be attributed to all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor to the Jews of today." Rather, it stressed, "Christ underwent His Passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love." The Jews, it was stressed, should not be presented as accursed or rejected by God.

According to the document, "the Church acknowledges that ...the beginnings of her faith are already found among the Patriarchs, Moses and the Prophets," and "recalls that Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, as well as most of the early Disciples sprang from the Jewish people." The declaration recommended theological studies and fraternal dialogues to foster mutual knowledge and respect between the two faiths. Finally, anti-Semitism was rejected explicitly -- a step never before taken in any Conciliar document: "The Church ... moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, deploras hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at any time or by anyone."

At the same time, the new text contained negative elements that were disturbing to many. The term "deicide" no longer appeared; moreover, the repudiation of the charge of the Jews' collective guilt for the death of Jesus was now prefaced with the qualification that "the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death



of Christ." A clause emphasizing that "Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation" also was added. Where the earlier text had said the Church "deplores, indeed condemns" hatred of the Jews, the new draft retained only the term "deplores." Again, where the older version, in denying that the Jews were a cursed people, had flatly forbidden any teaching "that could give rise to hatred or contempt for Jews in the hearts of Christians," the new text stated less emphatically that "the Jews should not be presented as rejected by God or accursed, as if this follows from Holy Scriptures," adding an injunction to teach nothing "inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel and with the spirit of Christ."

At a bishops' press conference, the American theological experts held that the new text was preferable to the old. Nevertheless, newspaper stories from Rome predicted heated debate over the new wording both at the Council sessions and behind the scenes.

Four days after the new draft was made public, Paul VI arrived in New York for the first visit by any Pope to the Western Hemisphere. In the course of one day, October 4, the Pontiff addressed the United Nations General Assembly, celebrated Mass at a peace rally in Yankee Stadium, conferred privately with President Lyndon B. Johnson and met with representative Catholic, Protestant, Eastern Orthodox and Jewish leaders "to symbolize the mutual concerns of religion and world peace." Seven American Jewish Committee officers were present. In addition to the speakers representing the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faiths, three guests--the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church in America; an old and close Jewish

friend of Cardinal Spellman's; and the President of the American Jewish Committee--were presented to the Pope.

The Papal visit did nothing, however, to alter the mixed feelings evoked by the new version of the Jewish declaration among many Jews and Christians alike. Together with satisfaction that the declaration had survived, there were regrets over the departures from the more vigorous 1964 version and misgivings about the new note of ambivalence. A number of observers felt that, though the substance was not greatly changed, the theological qualifications that had been added might in some cases defeat the purpose of the document.

The American Jewish Committee's initial response was one of gratification tempered with disappointment. While acknowledging the "sharp and explicit condemnation of anti-Semitism" in the new draft, and its stress on "the common bonds between Jews and Christians," the Committee nevertheless noted that the older text had been more decisive and satisfactory.

As the time for the vote drew near, last-minute efforts were undertaken to restore some of the vigor the document had lost in revision. On October 11, The New York Times, back on the stands after several weeks of a newspaper strike blackout, reported that attempts were under way to persuade a sufficient number of the Council Fathers to assure rejection of the changes; a last-minute appeal for restoration of the original text by a Council peritus, Abbé René Laurentin, was reported the next day.

It was evident, however, that these efforts stood little chance of success. Open dissension on the Council floor, it was feared, would simply play into the hands of conservatives, who, according to private and press reports, were still hoping to persuade the Pope to add a qualified collective-guilt clause to the final text.

On October 14, the declaration came before the Council for a vote. In a written summary and an address to the Council Fathers, Cardinal Bea, representing the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, called for adoption of the text as released and defended the revisions that had been made.

The pressure for these changes, he explained, had come both from bishops in Arab lands, who argued that Moslem states considered the earlier wording politically favorable to Israel, and from conservative theologians, who insisted that the exoneration of the Jews be qualified by Scriptural references to the role of Jewish leadership in the death of Jesus. The term "deicide" had been eliminated, the Cardinal stressed, because it had caused "difficulties and controversies," but the essential injunction to Catholics against the teaching of anything "inconsistent with the truth of the Gospel" remained intact. The word "condemned" in reference to anti-Semitism had been dropped, he added, because it was felt that this term should be reserved for heresies. (Observers pointed out, however, that as long ago as 1928, a Holy Office document had "condemned" anti-Semitism.)

The same afternoon, the Council Fathers voted, 1,875 to 188, in favor of the clause stating that responsibility for Jesus' death could not be attributed

collectively to all Jews. The omission of the word "deicide" in this context was approved, 1,821 to 245; the passage deploring anti-Semitism was accepted, 1,905 to 199. The entire schema on non-Christian religions was approved, 1,763 to 250.

The American Jewish Committee characterized the Council's vote as "an act of justice long overdue," but expressed keen regret over some of its assertions on the ground that they might "give rise to misunderstandings." The President of the Committee stated the hope that the declaration -- especially its repudiation of the "invidious" charge of the collective guilt of the Jews for the death of Jesus and its rejection of anti-Semitism -- would afford "new opportunities for improved interreligious understanding and cooperation throughout the world."

The ultimate significance of the step just taken, he went on, would depend on "the manner and vigor with which the affirmative principles embodied in this declaration will be carried out." In that connection, he said that the American Jewish Committee had been heartened to learn of the recent creation of a special Commission on Catholic-Jewish Relations by the American hierarchy.

The measure came to a final public vote on October 28 -- a date chosen by the Pontiff, it was announced, because it was the anniversary of the late Pope John's election to the Papacy. The vote was 2,221 in favor, 88 opposed and 3 void. Immediately afterwards, Pope Paul promulgated the declaration.

## **The Task Ahead**

If the declaration thus falls somewhat short of its supporters' highest hopes, it nevertheless signals a historic turning point. For the first time in the history of the 21 Ecumenical Councils, the highest ecclesiastical authorities have committed the Church to uprooting the charge of collective guilt against the Jews, eliminating anti-Semitism and fostering mutual knowledge and respect between Catholics and Jews.

Obviously, such deepened understanding will not spring up quickly or spontaneously. The antagonisms of centuries will not be swept away overnight. For people of good will on both sides, decades of massive work lie ahead.

We of the American Jewish Committee have participated from the very beginning in this Catholic-Jewish encounter, the most significant of our time. We are prepared to do our utmost to help fulfill the promises of the declaration.

Already, we have begun to enlarge our consulting services to Catholic educators, notably in the training of teachers and seminarians and in textbook publishing, as well as in the conduct of lay dialogues. These services will remain in demand for many years to come. We also will continue--if possible, increase--our support for the teaching and study of interreligious relationships in joint ventures with academic institutions like the new Sperry Center for Intergroup Cooperation at Pro Deo University in Rome, as well as elsewhere in Europe and in Latin America.

In addition, we will offer to collaborate, here and abroad, in new Catholic-Jewish enterprises, both scholarly and civic. Finally, we hope to institute programs that will help Jews examine their own attitudes toward Christians.

Whatever the American Jewish Committee has contributed to the advancement of interfaith relations so far has been made possible by the personal service and support of its members and staff. Ahead lie tasks that dwarf the accomplishments to date; but with the continued help of a devoted constituency, the Committee can rise to this even greater challenge.