

Catholic-Jewish Dialogue Since 1945: Survey and Observations

by Franz Mussner

The sheer profusion of declarations on the theme of "Judaism" throughout the Catholic world since the end of World War II makes it impossible to give a comprehensive presentation, even in summary form, in a single article. Accordingly, I have attempted to make a selection that would include the declarations of greatest importance and consequence for the Catholic-Jewish dialogue. Here too, I have had to restrict myself to statements issuing from Vatican and German sources. I shall select quotations from those statements and add some observations.¹

Council, Vatican and Pope

Any discussion of the Catholic position must begin, first and foremost, with Paragraph 4 of *Nostra Aetate*, the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on

This article is based on an address given at the inter-German symposium on Christian-Jewish relations held in Cologne on October 10–14, 1988. At the same time, it is offered in honor of Professor David Flusser, my Jewish colleague in Jerusalem, with whom I am bound by a friendship of many years. In all his work, Flusser has decisively helped to elucidate the Jewish roots of Christianity and to make the *Jew Jesus* familiar to Christians. For that, Christian theologians owe him their thanks.

1. Of great assistance to me has been the comprehensive reference work edited by Rolf Rendtorff and Hans Hermann Henrix, *Die Kirchen und das Judentum: Dokumente von 1954 bis 1985* (Munich, 1988). Many of these documents are available in English in the two volumes edited by Helga Croner: *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (London and New York, 1977) and *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents 1975–1983* (New York, 1985). Both *Dokumente* and *More Stepping Stones* include some "last-minute" documents issued after the closing years mentioned in their titles.

the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions." The declaration was approved, resolved and decreed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965.²

As Pope John Paul II commented in his speech during his visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986: "The decisive turning point in the relation of the Catholic Church toward Judaism and toward individual Jews takes place in this short but pregnant paragraph."³ The paragraph, dealing with the relation and position of the Catholic Church toward Judaism, is indeed short but pregnant. Moreover, the history of the formulation of this decree "counts among the most exciting processes of the Second Vatican Council" (H.H. Henrix); the background disputes were certainly dramatic.⁴ The consequences of the decree were equally significant. Its main affirmations are:⁵

- The Church "is spiritually tied to Abraham's stock"
- The Church has received the revelation of the Old Covenant, as expressed in writing in the "Old Testament," from Israel⁶
- The Church is nourished from the "root of the well-cultivated olive tree"⁷
- The Church acknowledges the privileges of Israel in sacred history, as enumerated by the Apostle Paul (in Romans 9:4)⁸
- Jesus, his mother Mary, his apostles and "most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world" sprang from the Jewish people⁹
- The Jews are "still beloved by God for the sake of their fathers" (cf. Romans 11:28b)

2. *Stepping Stones*, pp. 1–2; *Dokumente*, pp. 42–43.

3. See note 20 below.

4. Henrix, *Dokumente*, pp. 39–40. See the detailed account of J. Oesterreicher in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche: Kommentare* (Freiburg, Basle and Vienna, 1967), vol. 2, pp. 406–478. Also the accounts of Bruno Hussar: "Nostra Aetate nel ricordo d'un protagonista," *Studi Fatti Ricerchi* 32 (1985), 3–6; "Twenty Years after Nostra Aetate: Personal Memories," *Holy Land*, Winter 1985, pp. 215–220; "Nostra Aetate Twenty Years Later," *Holy Land*, Summer 1986, pp. 65–75.

5. Compare my *Traktat über die Juden* (2nd ed., Munich, 1988), pp. 388–391. The first edition was translated as *Tractate on the Jews* (London, 1984).

6. Compare Paragraph 14 of the Second Vatican's "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," *Dei Verbum*, in A. Flannery ed., *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Rev. ed., New York, 1984), vol. 1, p. 759: "Now the economy of salvation, foretold, recounted and explained by the sacred authors, appears as the true Word of God in the books of the Old Testament, that is why these books, divinely inspired, preserve a lasting value." Furthermore (Paragraph 15), these books "provide an understanding of God and man and make clear to all men how a just and merciful God deals with mankind ... Christians should accept with veneration these writings which give expression to a lively sense of God, which are a storehouse of sublime teaching on God and of sound wisdom on human life, as well as a wonderful treasury of prayers...."

7. Compare also my *Traktat*, pp. 68–74, and *Die Kraft der Wurzel: Judentum-Jesus-Kirche* (Freiburg, Basle and Vienna, 1987), pp. 153–159.

8. See further in *Traktat*, pp. 45–47.

9. Compare also L. Volken, *Jesus der Jude und das Jüdische im Judentum* (Düsseldorf, 1983).

- The Church, together with the Jews, awaits the “Day of the Lord,” which will bring ultimate salvation to the world¹⁰
- In looking back at the rich spiritual heritage of Israel,¹¹ the Church commits itself to “further mutual understanding and respect”
- The Jews should not be considered as “rejected or accursed by God”; the events of the Passion of Jesus “cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today”

Concerning the last mentioned point, we should also note the change in the reference to the Jews in the Good Friday Intercession.¹² Since 1971, it reads as follows:

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of His Name and in faithfulness to His covenant. Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption.

It is a notable change from the version of the Roman Missal that was in use from 1570 until the liturgical reform. Then the Good Friday Intercession read as follows:

Let us pray for the faithless Jews, that God, our Lord, remove the veil from their hearts, that they too may know our Lord Jesus Christ. Almighty and eternal God, may You not exclude the faithless Jews from Your mercy; hear our prayers which we bring you on account of that people’s blindness, that it may know the light of Your truth, which is Christ, that its darkness may be dissipated.

The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews was established on October 22, 1974, by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. On December 1, 1974, the Commission proclaimed its “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (n. 4).”¹³ The “Guidelines” were meant to “propose some first practical applications in different essential areas of the Church’s life, with a view to launching or developing sound relations between Catholics and their Jewish brothers.”

The main areas of application discussed in the “Guidelines” are: 1) “Dialogue,” 2) “Liturgy,” 3) “Teaching and Education” and 4) “Joint Social Action.” Dialogue is described as follows:

10. This is connected with the theme of the “outstanding promises,” that is, the recognition that by no means all the promises of the biblical prophets have yet been fulfilled through the coming of Jesus of Nazareth, e.g., the vision of a peace encompassing all peoples and of social justice for everyone. To quote J. Moltmann, *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes: Ein Beitrag zur messianischen Ekklesiologie* (Munich, 1975), p. 170: “Judaism inculcates into Christianity the experience of the unredeemedness of the world.... And so Israel stimulates the Church to hope.” Compare also *Traktat*, pp. 374–376.

11. Under the title, “Israel’s Great Heritage of Belief,” in *Traktat*, pp. 88–175, I have sought to articulate and elucidate thematically the spiritual heritage of Israel that came to the Church.

12. Cf. *Dokumente*, pp. 56–60.

13. *Stepping Stones*, pp. 11–16; *Dokumente*, pp. 48–53.

It constitutes a particularly suitable means of favoring a better mutual knowledge and, especially in the case of dialogue between Jews and Christians, of probing the riches of one's own tradition. Dialogue demands respect for the other as he is; above all, respect for his faith and his religious convictions.

An important affirmation in the "Guidelines" is: "The history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a religious tradition. And, although we believe that the importance and meaning of that tradition were deeply affected by the coming of Christ, it is nonetheless rich in religious values." Furthermore: "The problem of Jewish-Christian relations concerns the Church as such, since it is when 'pondering her own mystery' that she encounters the mystery of Israel."

The Commission issued on June 24, 1985, its "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church."¹⁴ Recalling, in its "Preliminary Considerations," that the "Guidelines" had taken up the issue of "Teaching and Education," the new document states in its first section, "Religious Teaching and Judaism":

The question is not merely to uproot from among the faithful the remains of antisemitism still to be found here and there, but much rather to arouse in them, through educational work, an exact knowledge of the wholly unique "bond" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4) which joins us, as a Church, to the Jews and to Judaism.

In the second section, "Relations between the Old and New Testament," the document encourages Christians to learn from the Jewish reading of the Old Testament, while emphasizing that the Christian reading is necessarily different.

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

The third section, on "Jewish Roots of Christianity," opens with the clear statement that "Jesus was and always remained a Jew." This section also deals — very well, in my opinion — with Jesus' ambivalent attitude toward the Pharisees. It notes that "Jesus shares, with the majority of Palestinian Jews of that time, some Pharisaic doctrines," and goes on to list them, adding that Paul shared them, too.

14. *More Stepping Stones*, pp. 220–232; *Dokumente*, pp. 92–103. It was published in German with an excellent introduction and analysis by Hans Hermann Henrix in *Arbeitshilfen des Sekretariates der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz* 44 (Bonn, 1986), pp. 45–58.

Next for discussion is “The Jews in the New Testament.” This fourth section is principally concerned with the expression “the Jews,” as it occurs frequently with a negative charge in the Gospel of John. The following conclusion is drawn, in my opinion, correctly:

Hence it cannot be ruled out that some references hostile or less than favorable to the Jews have their historical context in conflicts between the nascent Church and the Jewish community. Certain controversies¹⁵ reflect Christian-Jewish relations long after the time of Jesus.

“There is,” the section adds, “the sad fact that the majority of the Jewish people and its authorities did not believe in Jesus”; it “led inevitably to a rupture between Judaism and the young Church.” “This state of affairs is reflected in the redaction of the New Testament text and particularly in the Gospels” — also correct.¹⁶ Nonetheless, “this rupture...certainly does not cancel the spiritual ‘bond’ of which the Council speaks (*Nostra Aetate*, 4)...”

After a discussion of “Liturgy” in the fifth section, the sixth one takes up “Judaism and Christianity in History.” The opening words are simple: “The history of Israel did not end in 70 A.D.” Coming to modern times, it remarks: “The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law.” This sentence of the “Notes” strikes me as correct, as do the ones that immediately follow it:

The permanence of Israel (while so many ancient peoples have disappeared without trace) is a historic fact and a sign to be interpreted within God’s design. We must in any case rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people punished, preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic. It remains a chosen people, “the pure olive on which were grafted the branches of the wild olive which are the Gentiles” (John Paul II, March 6, 1982, alluding to Romans 11:17–24).

In this connection, the section reminds us “how the permanence of Israel is accompanied by a continuous spiritual fecundity in the rabbinic period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times.” Earlier, likewise, it recalled Israel’s “often heroic fidelity to the one God” throughout those ages.

In its “Conclusion,” the document emphasizes the need for Christian religious teaching on the points already mentioned. “There is evident, in particular, a painful ignorance of the history and traditions of Judaism, of which only negative aspects and often caricature seem to form part of the stock ideas of many Christians.” Unfortunately, this is still a fact today. In any case, the document is a very significant one.

15. On these controversies, precisely at the end of the first Christian century, see, e.g., K. Wengst, *Bedrängte Gemeinde und verberrlichter Christus: Der historische Ort des Johannesevangeliums als Schlüssel zu seiner Interpretation* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1981); G. Reim, “Zur Lokalisierung der johanneischen Gemeinde,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* (NS) 32 (1988), 72–86.

16. Compare *Die Kraft der Wurzel*, pp. 164–171, on “The New Testament as a Document for the Process of Detachment of the Church from Israel.”

Having examined those important Vatican documents, let us turn to statements made by the Pope John Paul II in person. On November 17, 1980, he addressed the Central Committee of German Jews and the Rabbis' Conference in Mainz.¹⁷ He emphasized that he was concerned not only with "correcting a false religious view of the Jewish people...which in the course of history was one of the causes that contributed to misunderstandings and persecutions," but "above all" with "the dialogue between Christians and Jews." The Pope mentioned three "dimensions" of this dialogue, making explicit allusions to the Vatican "Guidelines" discussed above.

According to the Pope: "The first dimension of this dialogue, that is the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God, and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say a dialogue between the first and the second parts of her Bible." We must especially not overlook the fact that the Pope (referring to Romans 11:29) spoke here of "the Old Covenant, never revoked by God." By contrast, Christian theologians for long spoke and acted (as some do still today) as if God, because of the Jews' "hardness of heart" toward Jesus and the Gospel, had rejected His people, revoking the covenant that He made first with Abraham, the forefather of Israel, and then with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. The Apostle Paul teaches precisely the opposite (cf. Romans 11:1 f., 29)! Christian theology must finally accept these words of the Pope and draw the necessary conclusions from them.¹⁸

In specifying the second dimension, the Pope placed a clear accent on the present: "A second dimension of our dialogue — the true and central one — is the meeting between the present-day Christian churches and the present-day people of the covenant concluded with Moses." The "third dimension," which the Pope wished to mention "briefly," consists of "Jews and Christians, as children of Abraham...committing themselves together for peace and justice among all men and people."¹⁹

Having thus recalled the "Guidelines," the Pope went on to speak of the attachment of Jews to the Land of Israel in the following terms:

In the light of this promise and call of Abraham's, I look with you to the destiny and role of your people among the peoples. I willingly pray with you for the fullness of Shalom for all your brothers, in nationality and faith, and also for the land to which Jews look with particular veneration ...May all peoples in Jerusalem soon be reconciled and blessed in Abraham!

17. *Dokumente*, pp. 74–77; English translation in E.J. Fisher and L. Klenicki eds., *John Paul II on Jews and Judaism 1979–1986* (Washington, D.C., 1987), pp. 33–36.

18. Compare my forthcoming contribution to a Festschrift, "Der von Gott nie verkündigte Bund: Fragen an Römer 11,27." The Vatican Secretariat (Council) for Promoting Christian Unity is also concerned with this theme.

19. On this compare H. Heinz, "Damit die Erde menschlich bleibt: Gemeinsame Verantwortung von Juden und Christen für die Zukunft," in *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken: Berichte und Dokumente* 63 (February 1987), 20–28; and my "Gemeinsame Aufgaben und Ziele von Juden und Christen gegenüber der modernen Welt," *Kairos* 29 (1987), 159–165.

This meeting in Mainz indeed represents an extraordinary high point. An even more important climax, however, was certainly the Pope's visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1986. This appearance was initiated by the Pope and must be regarded as a historic event. The Pope said in his speech²⁰ that he wished to assume the legacy of Pope John XXIII. He expressed his "abhorrence for the genocide decreed against Jewish people adopted during the last War, which led to the Holocaust of millions of innocent victims," and referred to his visit to Auschwitz of June 7, 1979. He then spoke of *Nostra Aetate*, recalling especially "three points" from that document.

First point: The "bond" of the Church with Judaism:

The Jewish religion is not "extrinsic" to us, but in a certain way is "intrinsic" to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship that we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.

Second point: "No ancestral or collective blame can be imputed to the Jews as a people for 'what happened in Christ's passion'; not indiscriminately to the Jews of that time, nor to those of today. So any alleged theological justification for discriminatory actions or, worse still, for acts of persecution, is unfounded." Third point: "...it is not lawful to say that the Jews are 'repudiated or cursed,' as if this were taught or could be deduced from the Sacred Scriptures of the Old or New Testament."

At the end of his speech, the Pope turned his eyes and his mind "to the Lord, to thank him and praise him for this joyful meeting and for the good things that are already flowing from it, for the rediscovered brotherhood and for the new and more profound understanding between us here in Rome, and between the Church and Judaism everywhere, in every country, for the benefit of all." In this context he quoted the opening of Psalm 118, in which both Israel and those who fear the Lord are exhorted to say that "His steadfast love endures for ever."

Federal Republic of Germany

Already on June 29, 1945, in their joint pastoral letter "Reverence for God and Man,"²¹ the Catholic bishops of the Cologne and Paderborn church districts expressed their deep sorrow at the "destruction produced by this most terrible and most gruesome of all wars." They wrote: "We are shocked by the revelation of the horrible acts of violence in the concentration camps, of the attempt to exterminate entire peoples, and of the most abominable crimes, which demonstrate an abyss of godless contempt for humankind...." The Jews, however, were not explicitly mentioned.

Admittedly, the joint pastoral letter issued by the Catholic bishops of Germany on August 23, 1945,²² does state: "We deeply mourn that many Germans,

20. English translation of the speech in *Common Ground* 1986:3,4-8, and *Christian Jewish Relations* 19:2 (1986), 52-56; German translation in *Dokumente*, pp. 106-111.

21. *Dokumente*, pp. 232-233.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

including ones from our ranks, were deluded by the false teachings of National Socialism and remained indifferent to crimes against human freedom and human dignity. Many abetted these crimes by their behavior; many became criminals themselves." Yet the millions of Jewish victims were mentioned only indirectly in the following sentence: "We are moved when we think of all those who shared their meager daily bread with innocent persecuted non-Aryans, while certainly awaiting, each and every day, the horrible fate destined for them and their protégés."

A clear voice, however, issued from the Seventy-Second German Catholic Day in Mainz, with its resolution of September 1948 on the "Jewish question."²³ The resolution spoke of the "publicly unopposed crimes against people of the Jewish race." Especially clear were the words of Cardinal Konrad von Preysing, Bishop of Berlin, in his pastoral letter of November 9, 1949.²⁴ In it, among other things, he said:

As you know, over five million Jews were murdered by the previous regime. Aged and children were not spared. It was a crime that remains unparalleled.

Further reactions were provoked by the trial of Adolf Eichmann. On May 31, 1961, the Catholic bishops of Germany issued a "Declaration on the Eichmann Trial"²⁵ and a "Prayer for the Murdered Jews and their Persecutors."²⁶ The prayer included the sentence: "We admit before You: Countless people were murdered in our midst because they belonged to the people from which the Messiah arose according to the flesh."

During the third session of the Second Vatican Council, controversy arose over the proposed declaration *Nostra Aetate*. It prompted the bishops of the Fulda Bishops' Conference, then gathered in Rome, to issue the following press release:²⁷

We German bishops welcome the Conciliar Decree on the Jews. When the Church in Council makes a statement about herself, she cannot be silent about her connection to the People of God of the Old Covenant. We are convinced that this Conciliar Declaration will give rise to a renewed contact and a better relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. We German bishops welcome the Decree especially as we are conscious of the grave injustice perpetrated against the Jews in the name of our people.

This is, at last, a clear statement. So also are the next three documents, which I feel obliged to include in this survey. One is the resolution "Our Hope: A Confession of Faith in Our Time,"²⁸ adopted at the Joint Synod of Dioceses of the Federal Republic of Germany of November 22, 1975. In the following

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 244.

28. See *ibid.*, pp. 245–246, for the relevant extract from the resolution, which is also given in English in *More Stepping Stones*, p. 66.

sentences, we find an honest and just way of speaking, free of any attempt at self-justification!

We are the country whose most recent political history is darkened by the systematic attempt to wipe out the Jewish people. And during this period of National Socialism we were..., taken as a whole, a church community that continued to live too much with its back turned to the fate of this persecuted Jewish people, whose gaze was so firmly fixed on the menace to our own institutions and which remained silent on the crimes perpetrated on Jews and Judaism.... That Christians even took active part in this persecution distresses us especially severely.

The second document, entitled "Basic Theological Issues of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue,"²⁹ came on May 8, 1979, from the dialogue group "Jews and Christians" of the Central Committee of German Catholics. Although, as a "working paper," it does not constitute an official announcement, it is nevertheless, in the words of H.H. Henrix,³⁰ "a theological study of rank and significance."

Eighteen Catholics and six Jews worked for more than two years on the formulation of the working paper. Its structure adequately reflects the concerns of its authors. Its first section is entitled "Why Seek the Dialogue?" and its second one "Conditions of a Dialogue Which Concerns the Jew as a Jew and the Christian as a Christian." The third section, on "Central Themes of the Dialogue," considers "Companionship of Jews and Christians" (here the delicate theme of Christology is also treated seriously!), "The Common Commission" and "Reconsidering the Controversy about Law and Grace."

The working paper's "conditions of dialogue" include:

The Christian Church, calling herself "People of God," must not forget that the present existence of Judaism is testimony that, still today, the same God is in faithfulness committed to that election through which He became Israel's God and made Israel His people. That is why the Christian does not adequately understand his own dignity and election, if he does not take notice of and seek to understand the dignity and election of the Judaism of today.

The third document is the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Judaism" issued by the German Bishops' Conference on April 28, 1980.³¹ To quote H.H. Henrix again,³² it "has the nature of a binding doctrinal proclamation on the relation of the Catholic Church to Judaism" and "is a message for Catholic Christians which is supported by the entire German Bishops' Conference." Of it, the Pope said in his address to the Central Committee of German Jews in Mainz:³³ "It is my eager desire that this declaration should become the spiritual property of all Catholics in Germany!" This wish has almost certainly not been fulfilled, as we unfortunately see time and time again.

29. *Dokumente*, pp. 253-260; *More Stepping Stones*, pp. 111-119.

30. *Dokumente*, p. 252.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 261-280; *More Stepping Stones*, pp. 124-145.

32. *Dokumente*, p. 261.

33. See note 17 above.

The declaration, in whose formulation I participated, is composed of six main sections. The first one, "Jesus Christ — Our Approach to Judaism," opens with the sentence: "He who encounters Jesus Christ encounters Judaism." It was this affirmation, too, that the Pope would cite as the starting point for his Mainz address.

The second section of the declaration recalls "Israel's Spiritual Heritage," which "Jesus Christ, through his Jewish origin...brought into the Church." Numerous topics are listed here:

- The "Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament"
- Monotheism as expressed in the Shema Israel
- The one and only God as Creator of the world
- The human being as the "image" of God
- The concept of the covenant
- The Decalogue as the foundation for true human communal life
- The messianic hope with its future-oriented thinking
- The praises of God, especially the Psalms
- The basic attitude to God
- The plan of God's salvation

On the last two points, the declaration says, among other things:

Israel's basic attitude before God, as shown in awe of God, obedience, recognition of God, repentance, "commemoration," love, trust, holiness, praise of God and proclamation of his holy deeds...are not 'discoveries' of the Church, but belong to the spiritual dowry of Israel to the Church, which she in her mission passes on again to all people, established anew and conclusively in Christ.

From the spiritual heritage of Israel, one can quote those events in which the plan of God's salvation of man is an actual historical fact and thus can be shown. In particular, reference should be made to the following, which are linked: Exodus, Passover, the Passion, Judgment, Resurrection.

The third section deals with "The Testimony of the Scriptures and the Church Concerning the Relationships between the Church and Judaism." It considers "The Witness of the New Testament," whose positive and negative statements about the Jews are discussed, "Declarations of the Catholic Church" (on its relation to Judaism — this was treated in detail above), and "Declarations of Other Churches," where a whole series of Protestant declarations are "gratefully" recalled.

"Differences of Belief" come in the fourth section. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is "the promised Messiah" and even "the consubstantial Son of God," through whose coming the eschatological Kingdom of God is "close at hand." They are also separated from Jews in holding that "the way of man to redemption now leads exclusively through belief in the crucified and risen Christ and no longer through the 'keeping of the Law'" (here Paul is liberally quoted).

All the same, the fifth section calls for “Rethinking about Judaism” among Christians, since:

All too often Judaism was referred to in the Church in a false and distorted way, particularly in sermons and catechisms. False attitudes were the result. Wherever faults or misjudgments exist, rethinking and repentance are necessary.

This is especially true, the section continues, regarding factors that often gave rise to Christian anti-Judaism:

- Wrongly treating the expression “the Jews” in John’s Gospel as if it applied to all Jews
- The many unjust and false things said about “the Pharisees” in exegesis, preaching and catechism, things that have no relation at all to the historic Pharisee movement
- Misrepresentations of the Jewish “Life of Torah”³⁴
- Referring to the Jews, falsely, as the “killers of God”

The section exhorts: “A serious dialogue of reciprocal love and understanding must replace the ‘antisemitism’ that, to some extent, still lives on in Christians.” The new form of prayer for the Jewish people in the Good Friday Liturgy (see above) must be taken to heart. Moreover:

Included also in the Christian duty toward the Jews is the perpetual prayer for the millions of Jews murdered in the course of history and the constant plea to God for forgiveness for the frequent failures and the numerous occasions of neglect which have made Christians guilty in their attitude to the Jews.... In Germany we have particular cause to ask forgiveness of God and of our Jewish brethren.

The sixth section, finally, comes to the “Common Tasks” of Christians and Jews:

- The realization of God’s will in the world
- The prophetic protest against existing injustice in economic and social fields and against all ideological oppression
- Coming together for “Shalom” in the entire world: the Hebrew conception of Shalom is an “all-embracing” one, which includes “peace, joy, freedom, reconciliation, partnership, harmony, truth, communication and humanity”
- Recognizing that humankind cannot achieve the consummation of history by secular means alone; only God can deliver ultimate redemption — “God all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28)

The content of the declaration is rich.³⁵ On the Jewish side, some objected that the “Land theme” was not discussed. It was, indeed, difficult to introduce this theme — perhaps because the bishops feared a “politicization” of the declaration. Yet the “Land theme” is included, if only in an indirect way. The

34. Compare *Die Kraft der Wurzel*, pp. 13–20.

35. Compare also the declaration of Bishop Paul-Werner Scheele, Chairman of the Commission for Ecumenism of the German Bishops’ Conference, to the press on May 22, 1980, *Dokumente*, pp. 280–284.

covenants made with Abraham are mentioned, “where God gives to Abraham the sworn pledge of the fulfillment of the Promised Land.” Furthermore, in connection with Acts 1:6–8, which speaks of the “restoration of the Promised Kingdom,” the document adds “as the prophets of the Old Covenant have already prophesied.”

The dialogue has begun. It can and must continue for the blessing of Israel and the Church.

I will close with the words of the French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, spoken at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Synod of Bishops in Rome on October 4, 1983:³⁶

The great, nay the inevitable question that is put to the Church is that of the permanent vocation of the Jewish people, of its significance for Christians themselves. It is not enough to discover the riches of our common patrimony. Little by little, following the Second Vatican Council, the Church, without losing anything of its originality, is becoming aware that it is all the more flourishing in proportion as it lives from its Jewish root.

Immanuel 24/25

36. *More Stepping Stones*, p. 61; *Dokumente*, p. 219.