

annexation of East Jerusalem as invalid and Israeli subsequent actions as null and void? If so, what would Jewish reaction be? We already have some idea in the Jewish response to something much less—*L'Osservatore Romano's* criticism some years ago of Israeli housing construction in East Jerusalem.

Suppose the Vatican were to take up in a public document the injustice by which Palestinians (some belonging to the Catholic Church) from areas within Israel who never left Israel, were declared "absent-present" and were deprived of their land. Suppose the Vatican were to publicly admonish (as Pope Paul did privately during Mrs. Golda Meir's visit to the Vatican) the Israeli Government for the mistreatment of Palestinians living under its control. Suppose the Vatican were to raise questions about the basic difficulty of non-Jews in a Jewish state and declare, as the Catholic bishops of the Holy Land did in their December 15, 1971, letter to the Catholic bishops of the U.S., that "an effective solution cannot be reached by a unilateral conception which would necessarily lead to domination by one ethnic group."

To sum it all up, the Vatican, by avoiding touchy subjects on which it would have had to express "harsh" judgments, has spared Jews much anguish, something of which, I suppose, Rabbi Siegman is too intelligent and politically alert not be keenly aware.

A final point. It would be misleading to imply that the French statement, which Rabbi Siegman praises so much and which drew much adverse criticism, represents the French episcopal conference.

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To the Editors: Rabbi Siegman's voice is gentle and discerning. Small wonder that his piece in the December issue has been praised by several churchmen as a thoughtful analysis of some aspects of the new encounter of Christians and Jews. His observation—"Nostra Aetate marked a turning point in the history of the Catholic Church and the Jewish people"—is a case in point. That it is framed by statements less discreet, less sensitive, is a pity but does not gainsay its judiciousness. Ours is an impatient age. Though the issue is not a



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historical being is now fairly common, though the modern mind rebels against authoritative statements, many non-Catholics, Jews in particular, expect the Church to speak on issues of their concern dogmatically so that matters would be settled once and for all.

Am I mistaken in assuming that Rabbi Siegman's comment acknowledges, at least implicitly, the fact that, after centuries of hostility and estrangement, the Conciliar Statement on the Church and the Jewish People could be no more—and no less—than a breakthrough, a new beginning? It could not contain everything that needed to be said. Even if it had been possible to state to the fullest the new vision of the reality of Judaism and of the Church's roots in, and bond to, it, it would not have been wise to do so. In this instance as in others it seems better to trust the inner dynamic of an issue or a message.

Moreover, in summoning Catholics to change their hearts and rethink some false theologoumena about the Jews, the Council had to rely on the creativity of time. Things of the spirit are not like ready-made articles of cloth. They are rather like seeds that are sown, that sprout, blossom, and bear fruit. I am sorry that Rabbi Siegman, at one point at least, seems to think little of growth and calls it, disdainfully I fear, "local option legislation."

I regret even more that Siegman misjudges the motivation of the Council so completely that he can write: "Jews generally understood that the Catholic Church saw its Statement on the Jews as an act of charity...." I wonder how he, a deskman, determined what Jews generally thought about Vatican II's action. To characterize its message as "charity" sounds more like the propaganda of those Jews who opposed the Council's declaration even before it was born. Showing the mildest interest in the proceedings of the Council was considered an acknowledgment of Christianity and thus apostasy.

As the one who wrote the set of principles that guided the early drafts of the Conciliar Statement and as a member of the team which, under the direction of the bishops, prepared the major versions, I know something of the spirit that prompted the bishops. Some had theological misconceptions, others political prejudices or antipathies; "charity" in the popular sense—the bending down of one who thinks himself

superior in dignity, rank, or power to another who is considered inferior—was not among the forces that could have "pulled" the Council "down." Charity in the Christian sense, however, the love of others for the sake of God, was, I am happy to say, part of the dynamic that moved the overwhelming majority (2,312) of bishops in a solemn vote at the day of promulgation to approve the Statement. The no-sayers were no more than 88.

I am at a loss to understand other misreadings of the Conciliar Statement on the Jews. Rabbi Siegman maintains that "the universal and perennial attitude of the Catholic Church toward Judaism...that its vitality and religious worth are to be found in its pre-Christian existence only" remained "fundamentally unaltered by *Nostra Aetate*." Really? St. Paul said of his kinsmen: "Theirs is the sonship, and the glory, and the covenants...." The Council did not hesitate to make this assurance its own. It also proclaimed that "now as before, God holds [the Jews] most dear," that He "has not withdrawn [from them] His gifts and calling," that neither teachers nor preachers may present the Jewish people "as rejected or accused by God."

Again, it is hard to believe that Siegman should ignore the text of *Nostra Aetate*, that he should read rather the Statement with the eyes of headline writers. Nowhere in the document is it said that now Jews are "absolved" from the sin of deicide. Absolution implies real guilt. The Conciliar Statement, however, strongly opposes the notion of a collective guilt of the Jewish people, indeed, of collective guilt as such. Only editors, with little theological concern but with a great deal of interest in the appearance of the front page, spoke of the absolution of Jews by the Council.

It was no flattery but the truth when I began my letter by extolling Rabbi Siegman's keen, discerning mind. His unequivocal rejection of fears that see attempts of proselytism where there are none; his plea that the dialogue be based on respect for the uniqueness of both Christianity and Judaism rather than on that Christian theology accommodate itself to Jewish beliefs; the clarity with which he defends the possibility of a common meeting of Jews and Christians "in the presence of God"—all these are evidence of the perspicacity I admire.

Alas, such an attitude is not main-

tained throughout. Rabbi Siegman speaks of "the failure of the Christian world to assimilate, morally and theologically, the two seminal events of contemporary Jewry, the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel." I do not say that he is wrong. Unfortunately, he is right. With the exception of some outstanding personalities, however, Jews have not done very much better. One has but to recall Ben Gurion's hope that the Eichmann trial would awaken Israel's youths; for them the Holocaust had become an event in a remote past that seemed to have no bearing on their lives. Again, one need but read the complaint of an American Jewish father in the January, 1976, issue of *Moment* about the failure or inability of today's youngsters "to confront the Holocaust, to confront the unanswered—for many of us the unanswerable—challenge to faith that the Holocaust provides," and also of the inability of Jewish religious schools to teach the Holocaust in an existential manner.

When anguish drives a man or woman to argue with God, the anguish and argument may be as deep as love. But anyone—Jew or Christian—who experiences the Holocaust only as a challenge to his or her faith, who does not feel challenged—questioned—in the core of his own being, has never looked beyond the surface. The answer to the Holocaust must not be less but more love. Whoever says that all that is given us today are "moments of faith" is in danger of losing all faith. Faith, love, fidelity do not admit of a breaking up into several pieces. Had we—Jews and Christians—heard the voices of agony at Auschwitz and other substations of hell in our hearts; had we truly heard the message of rejuvenation that was born with the birth of the State of Israel, our faith would not be problem-ridden but passionate, our commitments would be stronger, our hopes surer. If I am right in this, then we have both failed, Jews and Christians, Christians and Jews. Modesty in speech is an essential part of all ecumenical encounters. What I have in mind is a moderation that forbids us to castigate others, no matter how well-founded our reproach may be, without bearing our own breast.

Rabbi Siegman ends his lively contribution on a note of confidence: The Church's new vision of, and attitude toward, Judaism "will find, I am per-

sueded, openness and appreciation, and, where appropriate, support and reciprocity in the Jewish community." May I applaud and thank him for these words? May I also express the hope that Christians will not slacken in their efforts to purge Christian thought and speech of even the most subtle antagonism against the people God made His "special possession" (Ex. 19:5).

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To the Editors: In your December, 1975, issue Rabbi Henry Siegman, Executive Vice President of the Synagogue Council of America, in his article "Jews and Christians—Beyond Brotherhood Week" stated: "...Pope Paul's [the VI] sensitivity to charges leveled against Pius XII are common knowledge. Since he served as Pius's Secretary of State, he sees the accusations as directed against himself as well."

In relation to this statement let me draw your attention, for the benefit of your readers, to the following facts:

1. Pope Pius XII's (Eugenio Pacelli, 1939-58) Secretary of State, until 1944 when he died, was Luigi Cardinal Maglione.
2. Pius XII did not appoint a successor to Maglione, but decided to utilize his own experience as the Secretary of State to his predecessor, Pope Pius XI, to act as his own Secretary of State.
3. Paul VI (Giovanni Battista Montini), the present Pope since 1963, was appointed by Pius XII in 1952 as Pro-Secretary of State for Ordinary Affairs and handled mainly the delicate problems of the Vatican.

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Henry Siegman Responds:

I am deeply grateful to Franklin Littell and to Robert Wilken for their thoughtful and generous comments.

That both are troubled by my position about the "ultimate incommensurability" of Judaism and Christianity as a starting point for the dialogue is sufficient reason for me to reexamine my

position. In the meantime, allow me to suggest—however tentatively—the following:

1. It would seem to be that an assertion of the "exclusivity" of Sinai and Calvary should not preclude a recognition of the mutual dependence of the two faiths and of their complementary testimony to God. (For the Jew, at least, rejection of Calvary does not preclude a salvific status for Christianity.) Nor need it contradict the notion that Judaism and Christianity have a commonality they do not share in their relations with the other faiths.

2. I am troubled by Littell's perception—if I understand him correctly—that dialogue is impossible if we do not accept at the outset that the inevitable change that dialogue brings about must be able to alter even our most fundamental faith affirmations. I agree with Littell that "the eschatological hope applies to Jews as well as Christians." But that, I think, begs the question, for how we each define that hope is determined by Sinai and Calvary.

The Reverend Joseph Ryan's letter reminded me how far we have actually come in our relations with the Roman Catholic Church; the ill will expressed in and between its lines already seems ages removed from the decency, friendship, and understanding Jews encounter in their relations with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church.

I do not wish to get involved in polemics with Father Ryan, for there exists no basis for dialogue between us. But let me indicate some of the unfortunate distortions contained in his letter.

1. The reference to General Peled is entirely dishonest. Peled is critical (as I have been—see my article in *Moment*, January, 1976). of the often uncritical support American Jews offer Israel's official foreign policy. Peled did *not* quarrel with the judgment that Israel's policy toward her minorities, for all of its problems, remains remarkably decent and humane, and most particularly when compared to the treatment of minorities in the Arab countries.

2. According to the Reverend Ryan, the reason the Vatican has been silent on the subject of Israel is concern for Jewish sensibilities, for it would then also have to speak out on Palestinian rights, Israel's annexation of Jerusalem, its occupation of the West Bank, etc.

If that argument is not entirely convincing, that is so because the Vatican

failed to recognize Israel during the nearly twenty years Israel existed within her pre-'67 borders and had not annexed Jerusalem.

Furthermore, since the Reverend Ryan too is "too intelligent and politically alert" (if I may return the compliment) not to know better, he must be aware that grave suppressions of human rights in many countries, even—if memory serves Father Ryan—Nazi Germany, did not affect the Holy See's diplomatic relations with those countries.

Perhaps the Reverend Ryan is right when he exalts that the French statement did not represent the views of the French Bishops. Far more important, however, is that Ryan no longer represents the views of the Catholic Church. That is ground for hope.

The letter from my very good friend, Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher, I find deeply troubling. How remarkable for a man who admits to having written drafts of the Conciliar document to suffer so grievous a lapse of memory as to quote the first half of a critical sentence in *Nostra Aetate*—"God holds the Jews most dear"—and to omit its conclusion—"for the sake of the Patriarchs." Does this Conciliar qualification on God's affection for the Jews really contradict my assertion that *Nostra Aetate* left unchanged the classical Christian view that Judaism's religious worth is to be found in its pre-Christian existence only?

There is finally a futility to this sort of argumentation; if nothing else, the ground is so familiar. One point, however, I am not free to leave unsaid. Yes, God knows there can be no self-righteousness after Auschwitz, for Jews no more than for Christians. But I hope I will be forgiven the observation that it takes enormous courage for a Christian to make that point to a Jew. If, as Monsignor Oesterreicher apparently finds, Jews are less than modest in their speech in the ecumenical encounter, if they are not fully seized of the "charity in the Christian sense" that, according to Monsignor Oesterreicher, is what characterized *Nostra Aetate*, it is not because we read history "with the eyes of headline writers." It is, rather, because we read history like the mourners that we are, still reciting the *Kaddish* for six million of our brothers and sisters interred in that massive graveyard that is Christian Europe.