

(Complete)

ANTI-JEWISH ELEMENTS IN CATHOLIC LITURGY

A Memorandum to

THE SECRETARIAT FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Submitted by

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

New York

November 17, 1961

## I THE JEWS IN CATHOLIC LITURGY

In submitting this memorandum to the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, we are motivated by the same desire that prompted our earlier\* memorandum on "The Image of the Jews in Catholic Teaching" - the desire to improve relations between Catholics and Jews. It is our hope that the present document, which focuses upon certain passages in Catholic liturgy which we consider prejudicial to Jews, will be accepted by the Secretariat as a constructive attempt to confront sources of misunderstanding and hostility between Catholics and Jews.

Attitudes communicated to Catholics in the public worship of the Church are deeply implanted and are supported by the authority of the Church and the solemn majesty of the service. Thus, when we call attention in this memorandum to passages in Roman Catholic liturgy which are hostile to Jews, we do so on the assumption that these passages, and the commentaries they have traditionally elicited, contribute to anti-Jewish attitudes and behavior -- an assumption unfortunately justified by Jewish historic experience.

---

\*

Submitted to His Eminence Augustin Cardinal Bea, July 13, 1961.

### Recent Changes in the Liturgy

We acknowledge with appreciation that recent changes have been made in the liturgy of the Church with a view toward effecting more positive understanding of the Jewish people and Judaism on the part of Catholics; i.e., the removal in 1955 of the special rubric which made the Jews the only exception to the rule of flectamus genua -- a rubric that was greatly offensive to Jews who were aware of it and knew its intention was to humiliate them; the specification by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, in 1948, that the expressions perfidis Judaeis and Judaica perfidia may be translated as signifying simply a lack of faith in the Christian revelation; and finally, the elimination of the words perfidia and perfidis by Pope John in 1959, and the subsequent authorization of this change by the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

Nevertheless, anti-Jewish passages remain within Catholic liturgy. These are found in:

- 1) liturgical books of the Church, such as Missale, Graduale, Vesperale, Antiphonale, etc. which serve the public worship in parish churches and cathedrals;
- 2) homilies and officially approved commentaries upon the public liturgy, which guide and inform the priest in the preparation of his sermon;
- 3) texts belonging to the monastic ritual, or to the Breviary or to obsolete ordines or sacramentaries;
- 4) so-called para-liturgical tracts.

In this memorandum we have limited our consideration to the first two categories, which are directly related to the public worship of the Church, although numerous anti-Jewish passages and interpretive remarks may be found in the third category<sup>1</sup> and in para-liturgical tracts, particularly in devotional materials prepared locally by sodalities, fraternities, etc.

- 
1. E.g. "Dicant nunc Judaei, quomodo milites custodientes sepulcrum perdiderunt Regem ad lapidis positionem. Quare non servabant Petram justitiae? Aut sepultum reddant, aut resurgentem adorent, nobiscum dicentes: 'Quod enim, vivit, vivit Deo, Alleluia'." (Hymn "Christus resurgens", Vesperale juxta ritum S. Ordinis Praedicatorum, Romae 1900, ed. Fruehwirth, p. 190/1)

"Let the Jews say, how the soldiers, who guarded the sepulchre, gave away the body of the King, according to the (changed) position of the tombstone. Why did they not serve the rock of justice? They should have either put back the stone, or adored the resurgent (Christ), saying with us: 'For he is alive, alive with God, Alleluia'".

"Erubescat Judaeus infelix qui dicit Christum ex Joseph semine esse natum." (Ibid., p. 433)

"May the wretched Jew blush for saying that Christ was born out of the seed of Joseph".

"Sit etiam signorum sonitus, Domine, Judeis et perfidis terrificatio valida resipiscenda a malitia..." (Liber ordinum, ed. Férotin, Paris, 1904) This is, according to Férotin, the oldest formula for the blessing of bells.

"Let also their clamorous sounding, (of the bells) be a strong deterrent to Jews and traitors, lest they take courage for new wickedness..."

"Lugeat carnalis Judaeus, sed spiritalis gaudeat Christianus..." (Ibid., p. 423)

"Let the carnal Jew mourn, but the spiritual Christian may rejoice..."

Footnotes continued from Page 3.

"Saevienti diabolo per ministeria Judaeorum formam  
servi nihil peccati habentis objecit..." (From the  
Breviarium juxta ritum S. Ordinis Praedicatorum  
/Dominican Order/ Tournay 1894, vol. I Good Friday;  
from the Sermones of Pope Leo I, p. 407)

"With the help of the Jews the sinless servant  
of God was thrown to the raving Devil..."

(Contra Judaeos) "O natio nefandi generis / cur gratiae  
donis abuteris?" (From Dom Ulysses Chevalier,  
Repertorium hymnologicum, vol. II, p. 213, No. 13302,  
Louvain, 1897.)

"O nation of infamous character, why do you abuse  
the gifts of God's grace?"

Within the public worship of the Church, there are a number of passages and statements expressing hostility to the Jewish people. For the most part, these are found in the New Testament lectionaries. Occasionally, a hostile comment drawn from the New Testament actually becomes a part of the Mass. For example. "Tradent enim vos in conciliis, et in synagoga suis flagellabunt vos..." (Commune Apostolorum et Evangelistarum, Vesperale Rom.) "They will hand you over in meetings and in their synagogues they will whip you..." This phrase is repeated during the Mass on the occasion of every memorial day of an Apostle or Evangelist.

In addition, some medieval hymns, several of which are still in liturgical use, are particularly prejudicial to Jews. We quote only a few instances:

Wipo's sequence for Easter (Victimae paschali laudes):  
Credendum est magis solae Mariae veraci  
Quam Judaeorum turbae fallaci

You should put more trust in Mary, the true one,  
Than in the horde of lying Jews.

Guillelmus Secundus: (Meditationes circa mysteria  
passionis Domini):  
Judaei Jesum Reum Mortis Conclamant.

Bos herum noscit rationis expers  
Sedulo impensas redimens labore;  
Te suum quaerit scelerata proles  
Perdere Patrem.

The Jews demand that Jesus be condemned to death.

Even a slave, stupid as an ox, recognizes his  
master and repays his expense with useful work;  
But this heinous brood would fain  
Ruin Thee, their Father!

While the texts and chants cited above give offense to Jews, we have, in this memorandum, centered our attention on that area of Catholic public worship which is considered most critical in the formulation of attitudes toward Jews and Judaism: the liturgy of the triduum, and the homilies based upon them. The triduum is the peak and climax of the Christian year. It stands out from all other holy days. It is the nucleus of the most ancient Christian worship. A great and extensive homiletic literature has evolved dealing with the triduum, and it is here that anti-Jewish sentiments and interpretations accumulate in their most concentrated form.

Moreover, history records that this period of the Christian calendar was often attended by the most harsh and vicious manifestations of anti-Semitism, by the notorious ritual blood libels, and by pogroms and massacres of the Jews. The medieval Hebrew chronicles attest to the widespread suffering that Jews endured at the hands of the populace during Holy Week.<sup>1</sup> Similar evidence is contained in the chronicles of the Christian historians of that period.<sup>2</sup> A contemporary acknowledgment of the relationship between the liturgy of the Holy Week and the mistreatment of Jews is found in the writing of Gregory Baum, O.S.A.:

...the days of Holy Week were the most dangerous ones of the year for medieval Jewry. The people, excited by the liturgy depicting the crime of "the Jews" would, on leaving the Church, molest and maltreat the Jewish population. In some areas the humiliation of the Jews took place even in Church as part of the ceremony.<sup>3</sup>

---

1. Emek habakha, ed. M. Wiener, Leipzig, 1858, pp.30,36,51, 56, 59, 63, et passim.

Liturgy in the Vernacular

All passages which are susceptible to anti-Jewish interpretation and which have been used to justify harsh anti-Jewish messages in past centuries and anti-Jewish sentiments in both past and present, are all the more dangerous when they are (1) said in the vernacular, (2) elaborated upon in subsequent homily.

---

Footnotes cont'd from p.5

2. "Abud Mogontiam Judei numero virorum ac mulierum mille et 14 interfecti sunt et maxima pars civitatis exusta est..."  
(Pertz, Mon. Wirziburgenses ad ann. 1096, II, 246)

"Near Mayence, a thousand and fourteen Jews, men and women, were killed and a large part of the city burned."

"Hoc anno (1420) Dominus Albertus Quintus dux Austriae captis omnibus Judaeis in tota Austria, in Octava Ascensionis Domini sub ortum solis et plurimis conversis ad fidem, tandem in feria quarta ante diem Pascae sequentis anni videlicet 21 omnes nondum converti volentes utriusque sexus fecit comburi sub una eademque hora; cremati sunt in Vienna 110 solidi utriusque sexus." (Oefelius, Rerum Boicarum scriptores, Chronicon Joannis Staindelii, in Mon. Germaniae, [ed. Pertz], I and II.)

"In this year (1420) the duke of Austria, the Lord Albert V, took all Jews of Austria prisoner; then, in the week after Ascension Day, right after dawn, many converted to the faith; but on Wednesday of Holy Week of the following year, he had the twenty-one who were still not willing to convert, of both sexes, burnt at the stake at one and the same hour; in Vienna 110 were burned of both sexes."

Footnotes cont'd. from p. 6

"Item in die Coenae in civitate Tridentina Judaei martyrisaverunt puerum quendam Christianum nomine Simonem, crudelissime....Et ob hoc Judaei in eadem civitate crudeliter per ignem, rotas et alia poenarum genera sunt puniti et interfecti. (1475)"  
(Chronicon Salisburgense, ed. Pez, II, p. 437)

"Likewise, on Maundy Thursday, in the city of Trent the Jews martyred a Christian boy by name of Simon in the most cruel way...On Account of this all the Jews of this city were cruelly killed by fire, the wheel, and other devices of torture. (1475)  
(This was the notorious case of Simon of Trent.)

3. Gregory Baum, O.S.A., The Jews and the Gospel: A Reexamination of the New Testament, Westminster, Md., Newman Press, 1961, p.10.

## II THE TRIDUUM

Within the liturgy of the triduum there are three categories of passages to be considered. These are:

- A. Readings from the New Testament lectionary
- B. Passages from patristic literature
- C. Liturgical poetry

Let us consider these three categories separately.

### A. New Testament Lectionary

The main lessons of Holy Week are taken from the Fourth Gospel<sup>1</sup>, which, as is commonly recognized, is the gospel most frequently used as the basis for the vilification of the Jews and as justification for anti-Jewish measures.

"There can be no doubt that John's gospel has often served as a justification for the contempt in which the Jewish people were held and even for the injustices and violence with which they were treated. The hostile passages which we find in the Church fathers likening synagogues to temples of the devil and making each individual Jew a co-operator with evil spirits in the fight against Christ's kingdom, have their literary origin in the Gospel of John... When the whole history of Christian hatred of the Jews is told and the account given of the pretended motives for it drawn from the New Testament, an impressive case could be made for the author of the Fourth Gospel being the father of Christian anti-Semitism."<sup>2</sup>

---

1. Cf. H. Schmidt, S.J., Introductio in Liturgiam Occidentalem, Rome, 1960, p. 516 ff.

"Sine ullo dubio, Evangelium S. Joannis in Quadragesima (immo in toto tempore paschali) gaudet praedilectione speciali, praesertim autem tribus ultimis hebdomadis ante Dominicam Resurrectionis...nam in istis Evangeliiis S. Joannis lateret antiquissimum systema lectionis continuae de S. Scriptura .."

Undoubtedly, the Gospel of St. John enjoys a special predilection during Quadragesima (indeed in the whole Easter Season), but particularly during the last three weeks before Resurrection Sunday...for in these lessons of St. John rest the oldest system of continuous reading from Holy Scripture...

2. Baum, op.cit., pp. 98-99 (Father Baum maintains that the gospels are not anti-Jewish in themselves, but have been erroneously used to support or justify anti-Semitism.)

B. Patristic Literature - St. Augustine's Lessons

If the gospel lessons of the triduum depict the Jews as a base and villainous people, motivated only by hatred and vengeance, the patristic literature -- which is the only homiletic literature elevated into the integral service of the triduum -- unfortunately serves to reinforce this defamatory stereotype.

Lectio V

Nostis qui conventus erat malignantium Judaeorum, et quae multitudo erat operantium iniquitatem. Quam iniquitatem? Quia voluerunt occidere Dominum Jesum Christum. Tanta opera bona, inquit, ostendi vobis: propter quod horum me vultis occidere? Pertulit omnes infirmos eorum, curavit omnes languidos eorum, praedicavit regnum caelorum, non tacuit vitia eorum, ut ipsa potius eis displicerent, non medicus, a quo sanabantur. His omnibus curationibus ejus ingrati, tamquam multa febre phrenetici, insanientes in medicum qui venerat curare eos, excogitaverunt consilium perdendi eum: tamquam ibi volentes probare, utrum vere homo sit, qui mori possit, an aliquid super homines sit, et mori se non permittat. Verbum ipsorum agnoscimus in Sapientia Salomonis: Morte turpissima, inquit, condemnemus eum. Interrogemus eum: erit enim respectus in sermonibus illius. Si enim vere Filius Dei est, liberet eum.

Translation

You know about the council of maligning Jews and whose was the conspiracy of wrong-doers. What wrong? For they intended to kill the Lord Jesus Christ. So many deeds of mercy have I shown you, says he; for which of those do you want to kill me? He supported their weak ones; cured all of their sick, preached the Kingdom of Heaven, did not gloss over their vices silently, so that they would lose pleasure in their sins, not in the physician, by whom they might be healed! Yet for all his loving endeavors they thanked him not; like frenzied by a delirious fever, whose fury went against the physician who came to heal them, they hit upon the plan to do away with him. Thus they meant to probe, whether he was a man, who could be put to death, or something superhuman, who would not permit himself to die. Their words we recognize in the Wisdom of Solomon:

"Let him be sentenced to an ignominious death, and thus we shall put him to the test; then in his own way he shall find deliverance. If he is God's Son indeed, God will deliver His Son."

Lectio VI

Exacuerunt tamquam gladium linguas suas. Non dicant Judaei : Non occidimus Christum. Etenim propterea eum dederunt judici Pilato, ut quasi ipsi a morte ejus viderentur immunes. Nam cum dixisset eis Pilatus : Vos eum occidite; responderunt: Nobis non licet occidere quemquam. Iniquitatem facinoris sui in judicem hominem refundere volebant : sed numquid Deum judicem fallebant? Quod fecit Pilatus, in eo ipso quod fecit, aliquantum particeps fuit : sed in comparatione illorum, multo ipse innocentior. Institit enim quantum potuit, ut illum ex eorum manibus liberaret : nam propterea flagellatum produxit ad eos. Non persequendo Dominum flagellavit, sed eorum furori satisfacere volens: ut vel sic jam mitescerent, et desinerent velle occidere, cum flagellatum viderent. Fecit et hoc. At ubi perseveraverunt, nostis illum lavisse manus, et dixisse, quod ipse non fecisset, mundum se esse a morte illius. Fecit tamen. Sed si reus, quia fecit vel invitus : illi innocentes, qui coegerunt ut faceret? Nullo modo. Sed ille dixit in eum sententiam, et jussit eum crucifigi, et quasi ipse occidit : et vos, o Judaei, occidistis. Unde occidistis? Gladio linguae : aculistis enim linguas vestras. Et quando percussistis, nisi quando clamastis : Crucifige, crucifige?

Translation

They sharpened their tongues like a sword. Let not the Jews say: we did not kill Jesus Christ. For exactly this was in their minds, when they handed Him over to Pilate, so that they themselves might appear innocent of His death...For, when Pilate said to them: you kill Him, they replied: we are not permitted to kill anyone. They wanted to shift the iniquity of their crime to a human judge: but, did they deceive the Divine judge? Whatever Pilate did, he was, to a certain extent, an accessory: but in comparison with them the Jews he was much more innocent. He endeavored, to the best of his ability, to deliver Him from their hands: thus he displayed Him to them scourged. He did not scourge the Lord in order to persecute Him, but because he wanted to satisfy their fury: so that they might relent and desist from wishing to kill Him when they had seen Him scourged. This, too, he did. But when they

persevered, you know that he washed his hands and said that, as it was not his doing, he was innocent of His death. This, too, he did. But if Pilate is guilty, because he did what he was bade by them, are they innocent who forced Pilate to act? In no way. Yet he pronounced the verdict and commanded Him to be crucified, and thus killed Him, as it were. But you, O Jews, have killed Him. In which way have you killed Him? With the sword of the tongue; for you sharpened your tongues. And when did you slay Him, but when you cried out: crucify, crucify?

These excerpts incorporate accusations against the Jewish people that have become the refrain of anti-Semites throughout the ages. The Jews, as a people, are depicted as merciless and vindictive. They are held collectively and unilaterally responsible for the Crucifixion, and their stigmatization as a deicide people is clear.

While the inclusion of these excerpts in the liturgy is a venerable tradition,<sup>1</sup> there exist many more lenient and favorable comments by St. Augustine himself (Sermo ad Judaeos) and by other fathers of the Church. It is regrettable that these passages -- which strengthen rather than balance the negative impact of the gospel lessons -- were selected.

- 
1. The custom of inserting patristic commentaries of the Psalter in the nocturns antedates Gregory the Great, as he advised his bishops: (Epist. XII; 24) "Dic (Mariano episcopo) ut commenta psalmorum legi ad vigiliis faciat." (Cf. C.Callewaert, J.D.C., De Brevarii Romani Liturgia; II., Bruges, 1939, p.124) The definite reference to St. Augustine's commentaries in the nocturn of Good Friday seems to appear for the first time in the Ordo Rom. 28 (ca. 800), contemporary in the Cod. Parisinus 974, where Duchesne located the primary sources more than sixty years ago. (Cf. Mgr. L. Duchesne, Christian Worship, 3rd ed., London 1903, p. 455; also H. Schmidt, S. J., Hebdomada Sancta II., Rome, 1957) Callewaert believes that the regular patristic lesson in the second nocturn was a consequence of St. Benedict's rule, whereas Mgr. Battifol takes it a "purely Roman creation". (Cf. Mgr. P. Battifol, History of the Breviary p. 526 Rome, 3rd ed. N. Y. 1912, p. 92)

C. Liturgical Poetry -- The Improperia

In the triduum, the most dramatic of all litanies are the Improperia. These verses, which represent the crucified Jesus indicting his own people in powerful and emotional language, have a strong potential anti-Jewish impact; unfortunately, the commentaries and homilies on this litany almost invariably interpret the indictment as directed solely against the Jewish people. (From the viewpoint of the Jewish scholar, the Improperia are particularly offensive because they are a deliberate inversion of a Jewish prayer of thanksgiving to God.\*) In America, the significance of this litany is magnified by its recitation in English by the entire congregation.

Latin Text

R Popule meus, quid feci tibi? aut in quo contristavi te?  
responde mihi.

(1) Quia eduxi te de terra Aegypti:parasti crucem Salvatori tuo.

R. (Trisagion)

(2) Quia eduxi te per desertum quadraginta annis, et manna cibavi te, et introduxi in terram satis optimam;parasti crucem Salvatori tuo.

R. (Trisagion)

(3) Quid ultra debui facere tibi, et non feci? Ego quidem plantavi te vineam meam speciosissimam: et tu facta es mihi nimis amara:

(3a) aceto namque sitim meam potasti:et lancea perforasti latus Salvatori tuo.

R. (Trisagion)

(4) Ego propter te flagellavi Aegyptum cum primogenitis suis: et tu me flagellatum tradidisti.

---

\*See Appendix A for remarks on the origin of the Improperia.

- R. Popule meus...
- (5) Ego te eduxi de Aegypto, demerso Pharaone in mare Rubrum;et tu me tradidisti principibus sacerdotum.  
R. Popule meus...
- (6) Ego ante te aperui mare:et aperuisti lancea latus meum.  
R. Popule meus...
- (7) Ego ante te praeivi columna nubis;et tu me duxisti ad praetorium Pilati.  
R. Popule meus...
- (8) Ego te pavi manna per desertum;et tu me caedidisti alapis et flagellis.  
R. Popule meus...
- (9) Ego te potavi aqua salutis de petra:et tu me potasti felle et aceto.  
R. Popule meus...
- (10) Ego propter te Chananaeorum reges percussi:et tu percussisti arundine caput meum.  
R. Popule meus...
- (11) Ego dedi tibi sceptrum regale; et tu dedisti capiti meo spineam coronam.  
R. Popule meus...
- (12) Ego te exaltavi magna virtute;et tu me suspendisti in patibulo crucis.  
R. Popule meus...

English Translation<sup>1</sup>

O My People, what have I done unto thee? Or in what have I offended thee? Answer Me. Because I led thee out of the land of Egypt, thou hast prepared a Cross for thy Savior. R. (Trisagion)

V Because I led thee out through the desert in forty years, and fed thee with manna, and brought thee into a very good land, thou hast prepared a Cross for thy Savior... R. (Trisagion)

V What more should I have done, and did it not? Behold I

---

<sup>1</sup>My Lenten Missal, explained by Rev. Joseph F. Stedman, Confraternity of the Precious Blood; New York, 1941. ("Three Hours Agony" Service) pp. 380 ff 381,382.

have planted thee as My fairest vine, and thou hast become very bitter unto Me, for thou hast quenched My thirst with vinegar, and with a lance hast thou pierced thy Savior's Side...

R. (Trisagion)

V For thee did I scourge Egypt and its firstborn, and thou hast given Me over to be scourged...

R. O My People...

V I led thee out of Egypt, overwhelming Pharaoh in the Red Sea, and thou hast delivered Me to the chief priests...

R. O My People...

V I opened the sea before thee, and thou hast opened My Side with a lance...

R. O My People...

V I went before thee in a pillar of cloud, and thou hast led me before the seat of Pilate...

R. O My People...

V I have fed thee with manna through the desert, and thou hast beaten me with blows and lashes...

R. O My People...

V I gave thee the water of salvation to drink from the rock, and thou hast given Me gall and vinegar to drink...

R. O My People...

V For thee I struck the kings of the Chanaanites, and thou hast struck My Head with a reed...

R. O My People...

V I gave thee a royal sceptre, and thou hast given My Head a crown of thorns...

R. O My People...

V With great power I lifted thee up, and thou hast hung me upon the gibbet of the Cross...

R. O My People...

The "people" who are accused of such great treachery and faithlessness are the Jews, since it was the Jewish people for whom God performed the acts specified in the poem. And, lest there should remain any doubt that the Jews are the object of this attack, the commentaries and homilies based on the Improperia

(indeed, on the entire triduum) make this abundantly clear. In fact, what a great opportunity has been lost here! Authoritative commentary could do much to mitigate the unfortunate effects of the Improperia, the patristic literature and the lectionary. It could provide the necessary background; explain, for example, that in the Gospel of John the term "the Jews" is unfortunately used to describe only the enemies of Jesus; it could caution the faithful against misinterpretation, universalize and internalize the Church's understanding of sin and redemption. For the most part, however, the commentaries do exactly the opposite; they point out and specify the guilt of the Jews and absolve the Romans of historical responsibility, and mankind of theological responsibility. They are often more vindictive and hostile toward the Jews than the liturgical passages upon which they, often falsely, elaborate.

### III COMMENTARIES

We are aware that commentaries are not directly inspired by the Sacred Congregation of Rites. Nevertheless, they could not exist without the liturgy on which they are based, and they cannot be separated from the liturgy with regard to their impact upon the feelings and attitudes of Catholics toward Jews. Negative commentaries about Jews may be stimulated by other, isolated passages in the gospels and the liturgy, but in the triduum, the most negative and hostile gospel passages, patristic literature and the Improperia all converge together at the most solemn and important of the Christian holy days, and it is here that the commentaries reinforce the most accusatory and vindictive aspects of the liturgy.

The following illustrations are excerpted from contemporary commentaries on the liturgy of the triduum, all written by priests or members of orders. Here, again, the Breviary and its commentaries have not been considered. These examples are all drawn from homilies on public worship, and they are typical, not exceptional, excerpts from approximately 50 commentaries scrutinized:

1. J.F. Stedman, ed., My Lenten Missal, New York, 1956

p. 269 (Thursday of Passion Week)

In the EPISTLE she [the Church] asks us to study the prayer of Azarias. His Jewish nation was suffering an exile of seventy years. In captivity they were atoning for the worship of false gods. In these modern days, the Jews are still dispersed in every nation, in a condition worse than exile. They have been atoning these 1900 years for the greatest of all crimes, committed when an entire nation rejected, crucified, and shed the Blood

of the Son of God. Amongst us Christians they are witnesses of a lost vocation, without 'prince, or prophet, or sacrifice,' or a temple in Jerusalem; divine punishment hangs over them until the end of time, when God, because of His promises to the Prophets, will, in some extraordinary way, bring them to believe and live in Jesus Christ.

p. 284 (Saturday of Passion Week)

...their [the Jews'] hatred of Him grew in proportion as He revealed His love for them the more and more. He permitted the destruction of their homeland as a correction, Worldly happiness caused them to neglect God and soul. Worldly suffering brought them to their knees...

2. Louis Bouyer, O. P., Le Mystère Pascal. Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1950.

p. 339

...quand bien même ceux que en sont l'objet ne lui répondent que par des rebuffades, et finalement par le deicide. Mais, quel sera leur sort, si cette extrémité n'a pu les emouvoir? Si cet amour les condamne, pouvons-nous dire, retournant le mot de saint Paul: qui les délivrera?

However, the very people who were the object [of His love] answered Him with rebuffs, and finally by deicide. But what will be their lot, if this supreme sacrifice could not move them? If that love condemns them, can we say anything except, in the words of St. Paul: Who will save them?

3. Prosper Gueranger, O.S.B., The Liturgical Year, Vol. 6, Passiontide and Holy Week, translated by Laurence Shepherd. Westminster, Md., Newman Press, 1947.

p. 312

Jerusalem is doomed to be a slave, and a slave to infidels, to all but the very end of time. She drew this frightful curse upon herself by the crimes she committed against the Son of God...

p. 321

The Synagogue, having crucified the Son of God, did its utmost to destroy the Church, by putting many of her children to death.

p. 328

The seventh psalm declares the vengeance of God on those who excite His anger. It shows us what will happen to the Synagogue...it shall drink the cup of God's wrath, even to 'The very dregs thereof'.

p. 458

Like the tiger that grows fiercer as he sees blood, so is Israel at the sight of Jesus after His scourging.

p. 460

The mark of parricide and deicide here fastens on this ungrateful and sacrilegious people; Cain-like, they shall wander fugitives on the earth. 1800 years and more have passed since then; slavery, misery, and contempt have been their portion; but the mark is still upon them...

4. John Rickaby, S.J., The Ecclesiastical Year. New York, Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1927.

p. 127

Jerusalem is the type of retribution falling heavily at last, after long delay and after several punishments grave but not finally catastrophic... On the other side stands the retribution for such iniquity, when its short triumph has passed. Not only Judas but the people at large had been treated as companions or equals by Christ...; and now the punishment for grossest infidelities to the trust reposed in them is that death shall seize upon them, and they shall go down quickly into Sheol, the dwelling of wickedness, 'the pit of destruction'...

p. 129

Men like these [Jews] loved a curse and it has fallen upon them; they disdained a blessing and it has been removed far from them. A curse clings to them as a garment or Nessus-shirt, and penetrates to their very bones...

5. Aemiliana Löhner, Nun of Herstelle, The Great Week: An Explanation of the Liturgy of Holy Week, translated by D.T. Bridgehouse. London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1958.

p.99

Our generation and our time have no difficulty in understanding the ancient songs of Zion. We have seen the late progeny of these sufferers, the Jews of our day, disappear in a cloud of destruction which choked down complaint. The world looked on with horror as the deluded wielders of power over great areas wickedly set themselves under vengeance for a guilt which, godless as they were, they could not understand... Jerusalem still mourns, Israel still mourns; but all peoples and all times mourn..."<sup>1</sup>

What are the common elements of prejudiced thinking and anti-Jewish interpretation that are found in the homiletic literature of Holy Week? We isolate a few of the most common stereotypes:

- 
1. This was the only sympathetic commentary encountered.

1. If the Jews prosper in a country during a certain time, this is interpreted as indication that they are unscrupulous materialists and worshippers of the Golden Calf.
2. If the Jews are oppressed or their lives are made miserable by temporal power, this is interpreted as proof that they are a despised people, fugitives and wanderers till the end of time. The suffering of the Jewish people is seen, not as an indication of man's brutality and inhumanity to his fellow man, but as proof that the Jews are a cursed people: "...it is from the lowly condition, inflicted upon the Jews by Christians, that the same Christians then pretend to prove the victory of the Church over the Synagogue and the superiority of the Christian faith."<sup>1</sup>
3. The language of the Old Testament and its sense of justice is in general criticized as wrathful and short of pity, stern and merciless. However, when this language turns against the Jews, as in the Prophetic literature, then the Christian theologians consider it eminently suitable and adequate. Instead of adopting the self-critical and self-corrective perspective embodied in the Prophetic writings, and applying the same standards to the Christian community, the vast majority of commentators use these passages as a polemic against the Jews.

---

1. Baum, op. cit., p. 7

4. Nearly all homilies stress the fact that the Jews are dispersed as a people and that they do not possess Jerusalem, the Holy City. Such comments are not only anachronistic in the light of recent world developments, but they give the unfortunate impression that the commentators are making a political judgment about current events. (In fact, the mentality formed by these traditional interpretations may predispose a writer to view current history with prejudiced eyes.)<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Cf., e.g., Civiltà Cattolica, April 1938: "Concerning the Question of Zionism", we read: "Judaism is a deeply corrupted Religion, it is nationalistic inasmuch as it is the religion of corrupt messianism."

IV CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sacra enim Liturgia ut humanis, ita divinis constat elementis; haec autem, ut patet, cum a Divino Redemptore constituta fuerint, nullo modo ab hominibus mutari possunt; illa vero, prout temporum, rerum animorumque necessitates postulant, varias commutationes habere possunt, quas Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, S. Spiritus auxilio innixa, comprobaverit... inde progrediens **incrementum** proficiscitur, quo peculiare excolendae religionis consuetudines ac peculiaris pietatis opera pedetemptim evolvuntur, et quorum tenuis dumtaxat iudicium superioribus aetatibus habebatur....

....Ita pari modo, cum de sacra Liturgia agitur, qui ad antiquos redire ritus consuetudinesque velit, novas repudiando normas, quae ex providentis Dei consilio ob mutatas rerum condiciones fuere inductae, non is procul dubio, ut facile cernere est, sapienti rectoque movetur studio.

Pius XII, Encycl. "Mediator Dei", pars IV.

We follow here the officially endorsed paraphrase given by C.R.A. Cunliffe of these celebrated passages from the Papal encyclical:

In 'Mediator Dei' the Pope distinguishes between the divine elements in the liturgy, which can never be changed, and the human elements of the liturgy, which were devised by the Church and are subject to change by her authority. The purpose of the latter is to engender in those who are to receive grace through the divine elements of the liturgy the optimum dispositions which will enable them to profit to the full.<sup>1</sup>

Of the passages which we have considered in this memorandum regarding the liturgy of the triduum, the Improperia and the lessons from St. Augustine's treatise on the Psalms are of human origin and character. Equally of human origin are the commentaries and homilies on the liturgy, whether written for educational or devotional purposes.

---

1. C.R.A. Cunliffe, English in the Liturgy, London, 1956, pg.50

In the interest of better relations between the adherents of the historical monotheistic religions, we request the Church to seek ways of mitigating the impact of the liturgy of the triduum. Were the Church to select passages which would accurately convey its true attitude toward the Jewish people, or to produce or stimulate authoritative interpretation or commentary which would, for once and for all, lift the charge or implication of deicide from the Jewish people, it would make a great contribution to increased understanding between Catholics and Jews.

Most Jews are profoundly convinced that the charge of deicide, uttered throughout the centuries has been a central factor in the persistent anti-Semitism of Western civilization.

Serious and thoughtful Catholic scholars have agreed that misinterpretations of Catholic scripture and teachings -- misinterpretations sometimes spread among the populace by ecclesiastics and church documents -- contributed to anti-Jewish prejudice up to, and including, the present. Yet, in a commentary on the Improperia written in 1950, only five years after the greatest planned slaughter in human history, we encounter the term "deicide," quite clearly intended to apply to the Jews, written by a responsible and learned Catholic author.<sup>1</sup>

---

1. Cf. comment by Louis Bouyer: "...quand bien même ceux qui en sort l'objet ne lui répondent que par des rebuffades, et finalement par le deicide..." (supra p.15)

That such a provocative charge may be found in Catholic homily five years after the horrors of the Nazi death camps is a source of deep disturbance. Not only does commentary of this sort misrepresent the intentions of the Church, it must, of necessity, create anxiety and suspicion among Jews.

In the light of the Church's authoritative and self-critical teaching, is it not time to put an end to the un-Christian use of the Jews as a scapegoat people?

We respectfully request that the Church, rectify, according to its own precedents and through its own methods, the passages in liturgy and teaching which, in themselves, or by way of homily, stimulate and reinforce the slanderous concept of the Jews as a cursed, despised, deicide people.

At this critical time in human history, the adherents of the great monotheistic, revealed religions must bend their efforts to do away with the barriers of suspicion and prejudice which have created bitterness and bloodshed in the past. We are faced, on the one hand, with the possibility of a man-made Armageddon and, on the other, with the threat of totalitarian anti-religious oppression. If we are to confront these great challenges, no fellow man who lives by God's commandments should be defamed or humiliated.

While the social and political realities of our time warrant such a response, our appeal is based primarily on moral grounds -- the principles of charity and the demands of justice.

Quod si delibatio sancta est,  
et massa, et si radix sancta,  
et rami. (Rom. XI: 16)

Secundum evangelium quidem  
inimici propter vos; secundum  
electionem, charissimi propter  
patres. (Rom. XI: 28)

Pax omni operanti bonum Judaeo  
primum, et graeco; non enim est  
acceptio personarum apud Deum  
(Rom. II:10, 11)

For if the firstfruit be holy,  
so is the lump also: and if the  
root be holy, so are the branches.  
(Rom. XI: 16)

As concerning the gospel, indeed,  
they are enemies for your sake:  
but are touching the election,  
they are most dear for the sake  
of the fathers.  
(Rom. XI: 28)

But glory and honour and peace  
to every one that worketh good:  
to the Jew first, and also to the  
Greek.  
For there is no respect of persons  
with God.  
(Rom. II: 10,11)

November 17, 1961