

# CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS

A Pastoral Letter



Archbishop Peter L. Gerety  
Archbishop of Newark, New Jersey

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## **Introduction**

“You shall love the Lord, your God . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mark 12, 30-31)

This command of our Lord should be very much on our mind during this holy season of Lent. According to the teaching of Jesus, the great test of our love of God is how we treat our fellow brothers and sisters, excluding no one from the embrace of our love.

In this Pastoral Letter I ask that we direct our attention in particular to our relationships with our neighbors who are our brothers and sisters of the Jewish faith. Christians and Jews have common roots. In recent times there has been a growing understanding of our debt as followers of Jesus to Biblical and Jewish teachings and practices.

And yet despite this common rootedness the relationships between Christians and Jews have all too frequently from the Christian side been characterized by persecutions, pogroms, expulsions, forced conversions and a whole range of horrible injustices. Anti-semitism must be acknowledged as an evil to which Christians have too often been prone. We should willingly acknowledge this sinful blot on our history and do all in our power in these our days to root it out of our lives.

The duty of love towards our Jewish brothers and sisters has taken on a special urgency during this twentieth century. Never in all the preceding centuries has there been such awful evidence of the evil of anti-semitism as during our time. The Holocaust took place during the years of the Second World War. Six million Jews, men, women and children, old and young, were put to death in a program directed to the extermination of a whole people.

It is true that thousands of others died alongside the Jews in that terrible slaughter of innocent people. However, the attack on the Jews had

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about it a particular generalized virulence never before seen in the whole history of mankind.

Surely the Nazis who directed the slaughter were not Christian. Nevertheless that the Holocaust took place in the so-called Christian West should never be forgotten. The seeds of anti-semitism long present among Christians undoubtedly prepared the way for such bitter fruit. This we must sorrowfully acknowledge.

However, with this acknowledgement must come a determination to cast out from our midst any traces of this great evil. The Holocaust must never be permitted to fade from our memory. Anti-semitism can never be squared with the Gospel imperative given to us by our Lord Himself, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

### **Some Significant Recent Moments in Catholic-Jewish Relations:**

#### **The Second Vatican Council and its aftermath**

Some events of the past two decades have been significant and encouraging in the area of Catholic-Jewish relations. The work of the Second Vatican Council was an historic milestone in this regard.

That assembly of the Catholic Bishops of the world was summoned to Rome by Pope John XXIII and opened on October 11, 1962. The Council issued, at the Pope's express request, a Declaration entitled "Nostra Aetate" which addressed the question of the relationships between the Church and the Jewish people. This was the first time this had ever been done in the solemn context of an ecumenical council.

The Bishops in the Declaration instructed us Catholics to look for our origins in the lives and teachings of the patriarchs and prophets and in the vicissitudes of the children of Abraham in their long history throughout centuries of growth, exile and renewal.

To know our privileges and responsibilities as God's children and followers of the Lord Jesus, we must indeed penetrate the mystery which is the Church. In doing this we cannot help but recall and appreciate the spiritual ties which link us to the Jewish people.

The Declaration should be seen as a new beginning in Catholic reflection and realities which are as old as the Gospel itself but which

have so frequently and for so long been neglected. One weakness of the document, however, was its lack of substantive references to the Jewish people living in our own time. In early 1975 guidelines were published by the Vatican in an effort to remedy this and to implement the principles laid down by the Declaration.

#### **Pope John Paul II**

During his visits to various countries, Pope John Paul II has addressed greetings to the Jewish people and expressed profound union with them in the sufferings of recent decades. The speech which he gave in Mainz, West Germany (November 17, 1980) is especially significant for its theological insights.

The Holy Father developed themes from the documents of the Second Vatican Council and also from more recent statements of the Vatican and the Bishops of Germany. He spoke directly to members of the Jewish community, but the message is of great significance for us Catholics as well. He said:

*"The depth and richness of our common patrimony is particularly revealed to us through a sympathetic dialogue and a cooperation of mutual trust . . .*

*"The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, of the encounter between God's people of the Old Covenant — never annulled by Him (cf. Romans 11:29) — and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within the Church between the first and the second part of its Bible . . .*

*"A second dimension of our dialogue — the actual and central one — is the encounter between today's Christian Churches and today's people of the Covenant concluded with Moses. The postconciliar guidelines tell how important it is for Christians to strive for a better understanding of the fundamental elements of the religious tradition of Judaism and to learn which fundamental lines are, according to their own understanding, essential for the lived reality of Jews. The road to a better getting-to-know each other is dialogue.*

*"Let me briefly mention a third dimension of our dialogue . . . As sons and daughters of Abraham, Jews and Christians are called to be a bless-*

*ing for the world (cf. Genesis 12:2). They will be a blessing if jointly they stand up for peace and justice among all people and peoples . . . The more this sacred duty puts its imprint on our encounter, the more does it redound to our own well-being.*

*"In the light of this Abrahamitic promise and call, I look with you at the destiny and role of your people among the nations of the world. I gladly pray with you for the fullness of shalom for all your brethren of the flesh and faith, also for the land on which all Jews looked with special reverence . . ." (1)*

On March 6 of this year the Holy Father returned to this same theme but in even stronger terms. He called upon Christians today to overcome the "misunderstandings, errors and even offenses" Christians of the past have inflicted on Jews. "The terrible persecutions suffered by the Jews in various periods of history have finally opened many eyes and wrought up many hearts," he said. "Christians are on the right path, that of justice and fraternity, in trying with respect and perseverance, to join with their semitic brothers around the common heritage, so rich for all."

The Pope was addressing the Commission formed under the jurisdiction of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity whose task is to study the improvement of religious relations between Roman Catholics and Jews. This Commission operates under the guidelines mentioned above and strives to implement its directives.

In his address the Pope very strongly raised the issue of Church teaching which many specialists see as a great problem in the effort to create an unprejudiced image of Jews. Speaking of the guidelines the Pope declared, "We must reach the point at which this teaching, at different levels of religious education, in the catechism taught to children and adolescents, presents the Jews and Judaism not only in an honest and objective manner, without any prejudice and without offending anyone, but even more with an active consciousness of the heritage we have broadly outlined." (cf. N.Y. Times March 6, 1982, p. 3)

In this connection it will be recalled that the Vatican Council's Declaration speaking of the passion and death of Jesus said, "Neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during His passion."

(1) "Die Begegnung von Papst Johannes Paul II mit den Repraesentanten der Juden in Deutschland," Freiburger Rundbrief 23 (1980) p. 3-4. (Translation by Msgr. J.M. Oesterreicher).

I rejoice that the highest authority in the Catholic Church is urging us with strong words to go forward with our efforts to better Catholic-Jewish relations.

### Developments in the United States

Here in the United States, in order to develop the growing recognition sparked by the Council that the Church needs to deepen her understanding of her Jewish patrimony, and to facilitate contacts with the Jewish communities, a Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations was founded. We are proud to say that this was located in the Archdiocese of Newark at Seton Hall University until 1970, when it was moved to Washington, D.C. Much important work is being accomplished across the nation by this Secretariat and its collaborators.

Even before the Council, pioneering work was being done within our Archdiocese. In 1953 the Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies was founded by Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher and situated on the campus of Seton Hall University under the aegis of my reverend predecessor, Archbishop Thomas A. Boland. The Institute collaborated with scholars and educators both in the United States and Europe to help in laying the ground work for the vision that found expression in the Second Vatican Council. When the time was ripe to intensify research into the Jewish background of the Gospel and the relation between the Church and the Jewish people, a Master's program in Judaeo-Christian Studies was established at Seton Hall University. Thus, significant efforts have been made in Catholic-Jewish relations within the Archdiocese of Newark that have benefited the Church universal. We recall these efforts as we seek now to renew our dedication to this task.

In November 1975 the Bishops of the United States issued a pastoral letter on Catholic-Jewish relations to encourage and guide those committed to the spirit of the Council's Declaration. They also wanted to stimulate Catholics in every parish to acquire a deeper appreciation of the Jewish roots of Christian faith. Significant work has been done in a number of areas across this country.

The efforts of many groups and individuals from both Christian and Jewish communities have contributed to the climate of understanding and collaboration that has developed in New Jersey and in our nation over the last two decades. While acknowledging that God's grace has worked wonders already, we must press forward to consolidate these gains in human relationships. It is especially imperative for us Catholics

to ground our faith ever more deeply in the integral message of the Gospel, never forgetting the duty of love which includes all and excludes none.

## The Present Situation

Before we place the Church's teaching within the context of our daily lives, we shall take a moment to discuss the ways in which Catholics and Jews find themselves in society. Of course, we mingle on the way to work and on the job, and we share similar interests in the arts, music and sports. But we must move to deeper levels and come to know each other as neighbors and fellow-citizens. As this takes place, we will discover not only the profundity and richness of each other's faith traditions, but also the humanitarian concerns and the lasting contributions to culture that each community has fostered over the centuries, and continues to make.

## Neighbors

Let us come to know each other as neighbors. Sad to relate in a number of European countries, Jews were not allowed to circulate freely among Christians and sometimes for long periods they were forced to live in ghetto communities separate from their Catholic neighbors. Fortunately, the freedoms guaranteed by our society provide a basis for true neighborliness, a sharing of life with its trials and triumphs, joys and sorrows. Although neighbors may differ with regard to specific beliefs and values, cultural background and outlook on life, they can still live in mutual esteem and respect. As we live side by side here in northern New Jersey, let us extend the warmth of friendship to one another, as we both continue our contribution to the life and culture of our state and nation.

It is heartening to see how both Christians and Jews reach out, not only to those of their own faith, but also to others from various parts of the world, in their time of suffering and need. Especially commendable is the delicate effort to assist refugees and other immigrants as they adapt to life in the United States. The ancient biblical tradition of hospitality reaches its peak when these people are encouraged to make their own contribution for the spiritual and cultural enrichment of all. Each person who is open to sharing with others can expect to receive a return in the beautiful gift of friendship.

## Fellow Citizens

Let us now consider our privileges and responsibilities as citizens. Equal under the law of our country, Christians, Jews and others enjoy the same rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities. Dedication to fostering the common good obligates us to work together in building a society guided by principles of justice and love. This motivates us to reach out to pursue the cause of peace everywhere, from our family circles to the family of nations.

Living side by side can occasion awareness of each other's needs and hurts, as well as involvement in major and minor problems. A recent and difficult example illustrates this. When the American Nazi Party planned to march through the streets of Skokie, Illinois, the city's Jewish inhabitants—almost all of whom were survivors of the Nazi persecution or their descendants — were overcome with fright and alarm. All the memories of the Holocaust were rekindled and all their fears awakened.

A number of Christians there sought to express their concern and sympathies by marching in protest, wearing blue and white armbands. It was an admirable example of solidarity between Christians and Jews. The incident made clear, however, that anti-semitism is not dead and that we need to work continually with our Jewish neighbors and others in shaping a society in which all citizens can live free of fear and confident that their rights are respected. This society is one in which rights such as free speech and free assembly supported by the First Amendment, and claimed in that incident by the neo-Nazi movement, are accompanied by concomitant responsibilities toward the welfare of others. We need not wait for a moment of crisis, but must work now as fellow citizens toward that goal.

Living side by side we also learn that one cannot categorize people by groups in their understanding of what social policy should be in our country and in our communities. In particular we must put aside prejudicial judgments as we debate and strive as American citizens to arrive at consensus for the common good. The effort must be to understand and respect one another.

Even in such a difficult question as that of the life of the unborn we will find despite differences of approach both Christians and Jews hold dear the sanctity of life. We are at one in our basic attitudes toward the handicapped, the severely ill and the poor and needy.

Indeed, Catholic views on such matters are rooted in our Jewish heritage. Basic to our convictions are the theological foundations on which they rest in our Judaeo-Christian tradition.

## Theological Foundations

As persons of faith, both Jews and Christians recognize that each human being is created in the Divine Image and Likeness. In this same faith that we share with our ancestors, we should realize that Jews and Christians are bearers of a common inheritance.

### Images of the Living God

In the light of an ancient Near Eastern culture, the Biblical author probably intended us to understand that as "images of God" (cf. Genesis 1:26-28) men and women are His partners, called to perfect the world in which they live. They represent God to all creation and particularly to fellow humans. They ought to be a manifestation of His Presence on earth.

All people have an interest in holding high the dignity of the human person, even if only for purposes of self-preservation. But Jews and Christians, because they believe humankind to be created in God's Image, are in fact commissioned by their faith to proclaim and preserve, to uphold human dignity and to combat its enemies.

### Image Leads to Imitation

Coupled with the insight that every human being is created in God's Image and Likeness (Genesis 1: 26-28) is the revelation that the basic principle of the moral life is imitation of God (cf. Leviticus 19:2). In Jewish experience the exalted challenge to imitate God is introduced clearly into the practical sphere of everyday existence with rabbinical reflection that God clothed the naked (Genesis 3:21), visited the sick (cf. Genesis 18:1), buried the dead (Deuteronomy 34:6). And in Jesus' parable about the sheep and the goats, the King's judgment is based on the recognition and response to the fact that every person bears the King's image. The principle, whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me (cf. Matthew 25:40), expresses a high ideal in the love of neighbor. And the very mention of what we call "the corporal acts of mercy" touches upon the very fabric of our ordinary contacts with

others. There is no good deed too insignificant to be worthy of our attention. Thus, our daily examination of conscience must include areas where we may have committed sins of omission, if we would respond ever more fully to the God in Whose Image we are made.

Imitation of God presupposes the realization that we are partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Peter 1:4), sharing in the very Life of God. Human beings experience life on many levels, the fullness of life being communion with the Living God (cf. Psalms 37, 42, 63). God's Presence with the believing community throughout its history is always morally demanding, and not merely a consoling presence. Thus in every generation, people must overcome the temptation to manipulate God for their own purposes (cf. 1 Samuel 4: 1-17; Matthew 4: 1-11), and act rather as sharers in the Divine Life.

Some people speak of the silence of God in our world today. When God seems to be silent or even absent from His world, we must ask whether the spiritual atmosphere of society is being structured by powerful forces that wish to exclude this morally demanding presence. Certain political systems can dull the voice of conscience so that even people of good will may lose their moorings. Thus before and during the Second World War, the Nazi architects of the Third Reich foisted a set of myths upon society to explain the meaning of life to the exclusion of the God of Israel, the Father of Jesus, and His commandments. The very existence of the Jewish people seemed to threaten this structure, because their presence bore witness to the One God Who stands beyond His creation, calling all human beings to respond to His sovereign will. So Hitler decreed the destruction of innocent lives by the millions.

The same dangers are widespread today, although political systems called by different names. As people responding to the Covenant, aware of God's Presence and moral demands, Jews and Christians should lift their voices together in protest against expressions of violence against any persons, especially the poor and helpless.

## The Covenant and People

The concept and vocabulary of Covenant provide one of the profound ways in which God's Presence with His people is known. The sacred writers drew upon the experience of the political relations between kings and their nations in the ancient world, and even more upon the sacred bond of love in marriage, to hint at the wonder of God's Commitment to His people and the total devotion expected in response.

The Covenant mediated by Moses at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20) is the mid-point between the Exodus and God's gift of the Land promised to Abraham and the other patriarchs. The Sinai Covenant is also the positive completion of the Divine Work of delivering the people of Israel from slavery and oppression in Egypt. The concept of redemption that Christians reflect upon during the Lenten season and celebrate in Holy Week is rooted in God's acquisition of Israel as His own people, with His gift of the Land to them so that they would be free to serve Him alone. This Covenant is bilateral because God not only promises to make Israel "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), but demands a response in obedience to commandments which he gives to Moses.

Israel's experience of Divine Redemption from slavery and saving gifts of wholeness and peace becomes the pattern for understanding God's activities in all later generations. At the return to the Land after the Babylonian Exile, the prophets described how the people crossed the desert in terms reminiscent of the way they crossed the Red Sea (Isaiah 51: 9-11). One does not see the full significance of the New Testament writers' interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection unless the Exodus-Sinai experience is kept in mind. The gracious Covenant cherished by Christians sprang from the salvation history of Israel.

At a distance of almost two millennia, and in a culture far removed from the details of biblical tradition, Catholics need to learn once again about Jewish prayer-life and liturgical practices. Thus they will understand the deepest meanings of the relationship with God that are symbolized by the concept of Covenant. Only then can we penetrate the meaning of our Eucharistic liturgy and other sacraments, and indeed the meaning of the Church. And in doing so we will rediscover how intimately Jews and Christians are linked to one another as bearers of a common inheritance.

### **Bearers of a Common Inheritance**

Some people speak of the God of Christians and the God of the Jews as if there were two different gods. Obviously this is not the case. For one and the same God addresses all people through the whole of Scripture, Old and New Testaments. He is the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob, of Moses, of the psalmists, and of the Jewish teachers of post-biblical times. He is, as we believe, the Father of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the house of David and was thus a member of the Jewish people. As Jesus was Jewish, so were the early disciples, indeed the first Christian community in Jerusalem. This should be obvious, but the Second Vatican Council rightly felt the need to call it to mind. In emphasizing the Jewishness of Jesus and of the early Church, and of the importance of that to us, we obviously do not speak merely of a blood relationship but also of a spiritual affinity. It is from the Jews of the biblical period that we learn of the reality of sin, the need of contrition, and the assurance of forgiveness. It is the God of Israel, the Lord of history, who saved us from pagan despair and existential anguish and leads us on the road of hope. It is the Jews who teach us the creative character and value of time, with the need to step back in rest and survey the relation of our work to the Divine Will. It is the Jews who lead us to believe that enduring happiness is not in the past, a golden age, long gone, but rather that it lies in the future. Jews and Christians both pray, "God, may Your kingdom come."

It is the Jews in their Law and their Prophets who teach us that there is no moral life without social justice. Thus, when there is a danger in our society that the "dignity of the human person" becomes a slogan of convenience, rather than a truth lived out from day to day, Jews and Christians as bearers of a common inheritance that sees humanity made in the Image of God must make it their task to lift up that dignity in support of human rights. Our common heritage proclaims it wrong to use another human being for one's own gain or pleasure, wrong to exploit workers, consumers and others. It is wrong to use the gifts of technology, the great discoveries and inventions intended to serve human beings and lift humanity to new horizons, to cause instead their degradation.

The turn of the millennium soon to be upon us and the opening of the planets to human investigation are just two factors indicating the exciting times in which we live. Let Jews and Christians together, sharing an ancient inheritance, bring their shared values to the task of seeing to it that future directions and discoveries of humankind be a blessing for all, and not a curse.

To engage in cooperative works, we need to rid ourselves of all prejudices of the past, and begin again a relationship rooted in our common inheritance.

## Past Prejudices and New Beginnings

It is indeed sad that generations of Christians have been ignorant of that understanding of God's plan for humanity and especially of the very person and work of Jesus, which can be provided only by an insight into the heritage preserved by the Jewish people. But, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, the far greater tragedy, related in part to the ignorance just mentioned, is Christian involvement in the many persecutions which have beset the Jewish people over the centuries.

### Rooting Out Misunderstandings and Distortions

As I have already mentioned, all too often in history, Christians on every level, including at times the highest leadership, have fomented hostility, animosity and outright violence toward Jews. These acts were often rooted in negative generalizations about Jews. But at various times throughout the centuries, as well, there were Popes who decried these manifestations of hatred. In the twentieth century, anti-semitism was condemned by the Holy Office in 1928, and again in the declaration *Nostra Aetate*.

It goes without saying that Catholics have a moral obligation to avoid injustices of any kind to Jews or others. But it is also important that we portray in a positive manner the Jewish background in which Jesus matured. His words and deeds need to be explained in the context of the Holy Land at that time.

During the first five decades of this century, critical scholars doubted the possibility of going back further than the Christian communities in and for which the New Testament documents were composed; they did not think it possible to discover more than the vague outlines of Jesus' teaching. However, archeological discoveries, publication of numerous unknown Jewish texts of ancient and medieval times, the increased collaboration among scholars of different Christian confessions, and especially discussion with Jewish scholars, have begun to change the picture. Refined tools for study and new documents for comparison permit students of the Bible to be enriched in many ways. Of course, the faith of the Church does not depend upon the vicissitudes of academic opinion. And yet, the deepening of our knowledge concerning the Scriptures is an obligation that weighs heavily upon all, especially teachers, because we should know the grounds for our belief and our doctrines. Moreover, appreciating the context of the expression of these doctrines

in the teaching of Jesus, the apostles and the evangelists, is an important key to a deeper insight into the mysteries of faith.

Another benefit of knowing the Jewish background of the early church relates to current efforts among separated Christians to seek new understanding through dialogue. Seeing the vitality of that Jewish tradition, and the diversity within it, helps Christians to see later Christian debates and discussions in a new light. In a number of crucial issues over which Christians have been divided for centuries — such as the interpretation of the presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist — this new light has been of great benefit to theologians of separated churches as they have sought through dialogue to end the divisions of the past and bring hope for greater unity in the future.

### Understanding the Passion of Jesus

Because of past misunderstandings, a proper understanding of the passion of Jesus and the events surrounding it is crucial to Catholic-Jewish Relations. For popular preaching and teaching has often used Catholic devotion to Christ crucified as an occasion for anti-Jewish statements. The Second Vatican Council stated that this is clearly not in harmony with either the truth or the spirit of the Gospel.

In the pulpit and classroom, we must guard against clichés and generalizations that would pit “the Jews” or “the Pharisees” against Jesus or the infant Church. The Jewish people of the Second Temple period harbored many spiritual, intellectual and political movements. Although Jesus did not belong to any of these groups, He stood closest to the Pharisees, and this is precisely the reason for the intense debates with some of them. In the majority of passages of the Fourth Gospel using the phrase “the Jews” St. John designates the Jewish authorities, especially in the context of the Passion and Resurrection narratives. The congregation should be made aware of this fact in the Good Friday liturgy and on other occasions when this Gospel is read. I urge our priests to make this clear to our people.

The use of the Bible in the liturgy is not merely for Catholics to review ancient history. Rather, the text is proclaimed as the Living Word of God, addressed directly to us as a community of faith. We are susceptible to the same human frailties as the Hebrews of the patriarchal age or the generation of Israelites who complained about their lot while wandering in the desert. In the Gospel, Jesus is challenging us to examine our



conscience concerning hypocrisy, selfishness and narrowness. The Hebrews and their descendants are typical human beings with all that implies in potential and frailty; their unique call by God and the constant challenge to keep the commandments are recorded in the Sacred Scriptures in brutal honesty and frankness. There we find the whole gamut of human problems and are shown God's way to deal with each.

The Liturgy of the Word achieves its salutary purpose if the readings and homily lead us to know our weaknesses and to grow into better persons. The exalted challenge of the Gospel should never discourage us, because the judging word of the readings comes to us in the Eucharistic sacrifice as the Lamb whose blood is shed for the forgiveness of our sins. He comes to pronounce the creative word of healing so that, in intimate communion with him, we may find the nourishment that strengthens us for active service of the heavenly Father.

As Christians, we readily see ourselves as heirs of the privileges of Israel. Let us recall that we have been adopted into the family of Abraham; like a wild shoot, Gentiles have been grafted onto the olive tree of Israel, supported by its root and sharing in the riches of its divinely-given life (cf. Romans 11:16-24). During Lent and Holy Week we recall the events relating to the passion of Jesus; there is no greater opportunity for Christians to delve into the heart of their faith. Nor is there a better occasion to appreciate their relationship to the descendants of Abraham.

### Applications

The imperative of fostering Christian unity has been aided enormously by the recent discussions between Christians and Jews. But the goals of Christian ecumenism and those of Jewish-Christian dialogue are different. While Christians seek to recover unity so that they can manifest God's Will to the world with greater efficacy, it seems to be part of the Divine Plan for Jews and Christians to challenge each other in love as distinct communities of faith until the final day, "known to God alone when all people will call upon God with one voice and 'serve Him shoulder to shoulder' (Nostra Aetate 4).

At the end of the liturgy we are sent forth to love the Father and share His Peace. This can be done in numerous ways through dialogue and col-

laboration with our Jewish sisters and brothers (cf. Vatican Guidelines of 1975). Let me suggest areas in which we can develop dialogue and collaboration between Catholics and Jews within this Archdiocese, and grow in serving the Lord together.

### Continuing Education

We all need to continue our efforts to appreciate the Jewish background of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church more deeply. This demand for deeper knowledge is especially incumbent upon priests, teachers, catechists and others active in education. Some can learn in the context of small Renew groups, Bible study classes, or numerous other ways within their parishes, while others can take advantage of opportunities offered in institutions of higher education. Special programs arranged by the Archdiocesan Offices for Religious Education and Liturgy can stimulate large numbers to study in groups or on their own. Some people can profit greatly from dialogue and discussion groups.

### Growth in Prayer

Study and prayer are closely related, and greater theological knowledge should nourish a more profound life of prayer. I have indicated already that understanding of our liturgy can be increased by study of the Bible and of Jewish practices at the time of Jesus and the early Church. An especially important part of biblical heritage which was taken in its entirety into the Church is the Book of Psalms. These prayers contain the human response to God in the context of the various situations of daily life. They have been central to the prayer life of Jewish and Christian communities over many centuries, and continue to provide inspiration for all who use them. As Christians, we can profit greatly from a study of the Psalter as it is used by the Jewish people. This would provide a rich banquet for Jewish and Christian dialogue.

### Occasions for Common Prayer

In many areas of the Archdiocese, there is already the practice of sharing a non-liturgical form of prayer between synagogues and churches, especially at Thanksgiving and on the Holocaust Memorial Day. This

should be encouraged; other opportunities for exchange might include days of hospitality and dialogue, visits to a neighboring synagogue, the demonstration of the Passover meal. Assistance may be sought through the Ecumenical Commission and the Institute of Judeo-Christian Studies.

### **Interfaith Marriages**

In the Archdiocese there are a number of Catholic-Jewish marriages; these couples should be able to appreciate the experience of learning and sharing between the two traditions. Efforts should be made so that they and their children can profit by the new understanding that is being developed in the Church.

### **Collaboration Toward Common Goals**

A common study of various social, legal and political issues can be fostered through lectures, discussions and informal exchanges between Christians and Jews. We should collaborate on the local and national levels to present the vision of biblical faith to those who influence public opinion and to our neighbors who show interest. Among the many important issues where sharing of views and perspectives would be helpful, perhaps none is more crucial today than the questions relating to war, nuclear disarmament and the coordination of peacemaking activities. Each community can be strengthened greatly by the application of theological principles to these great challenges of our time.

### **Learning About Each Other**

Dialogue demands respect for the other in his or her self-understanding. For most Jews an essential component of this self-understanding is a point of focus on the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Leaving political issues in their myriad details to be solved in the context of the Near East and its peoples, we Christians rejoice with the Jewish people that a representative portion has come to the land promised to the patriarchs, and hope that they will find there a continuing abode of peace for the creative response of Judaism to the call of God.

### **The Call: To Share Peace**

“Hillel said: ‘Belong to the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving human beings and bringing them near to the law’ ” (Mishnah Aboth 1:12).

Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they are the sons (and daughters) of God” (Matthew 5:9).

The greatest gift of God is the peace that comes from being with Him, and the greatest challenge of the Bible is to imitate the God of peace. As we Catholics and Jews come to know each other more deeply, we will find many aspirations and hopes to share. These in turn will move us to become ever more active servants of the One God, Who calls all creatures to union with Him and to harmony with each other. Ultimately we are called to be peacemakers. Let us begin by committing ourselves to praying and working for peace with one accord.

May this season of Lent be a time of special grace for us all. I call upon the Catholic people of the Archdiocese to offer an outstretched hand to our Jewish neighbors. There is much we can learn from each other. There are numerous tasks in which we can unite for the betterment of our society and for our response to God’s presence in the world.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Under God we are neighbors, indeed, we Jews and Christians are brothers and sisters, called to peace in love for one another.