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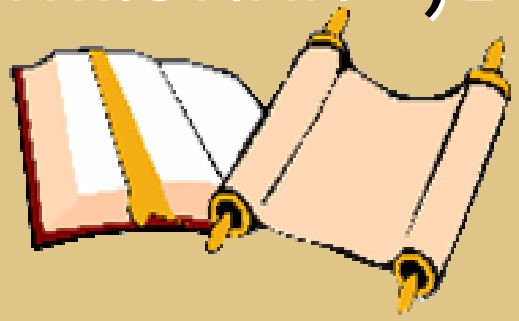
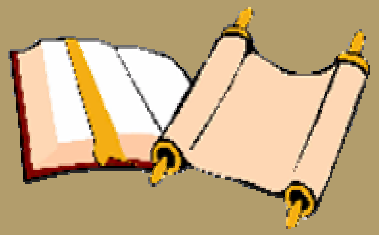
Center for Christian - Jewish Learning



Encouraging mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews at every level

The Theological Contributions of Pope John Paul II to Catholic-Jewish Relations

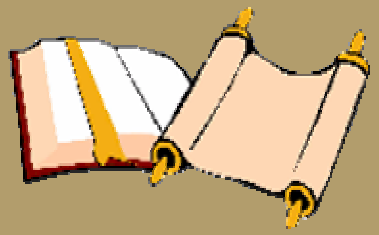


A tribute on the 25th anniversary of his papacy

October 16, 1978 - October 16, 2003

Outline

1. Background: The tendrils of the ancient Christian anti-Jewish tradition
2. The turning point - *Nostra Aetate*
3. Subsequent Vatican documents
4. The teachings of Pope John Paul II
5. Summary: Ten Papal Teachings
6. Conclusion



SUPERSESSIONISM: The Church has replaced Israel because of the Crucifixion.

The tendrils of the ancient anti-Jewish tradition

Scripture

- The Law was given for Jewish disobedience. It is not for Christians.
- Jews fail to read the "Old Testament" spiritually. They don't see its true meaning.
- God told the prophets that Jesus would come with a new law. They constantly chastised Jewish sinfulness.

Jews and Judaism

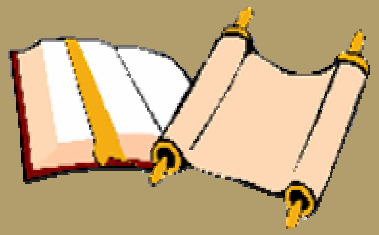
- Judaism prepared for Christianity and is now obsolete.
- It was corrupt, legalistic, carnal. The Pharisees embodied its worst traits.
- The Jews killed their Messiah and so are doomed to wander the earth.
- Jews are in league with the devil.

Jesus

- is the long-awaited Messiah of Israel who has fulfilled all Old Testament promises, not carnally but spiritually.
- He condemned Judaism. His blood is upon Jews today.
- He showed that God is a God of love, something that Judaism had forgotten.

The Church

- is the new People of God, the new Israel, completely realizing the promises of the Old Testament.
- Israel's blessings have been transferred to the Church.



SUPERSESSIONISM: The Church has replaced Israel because of the Crucifixion.

The tendrils of the ancient anti-Jewish tradition

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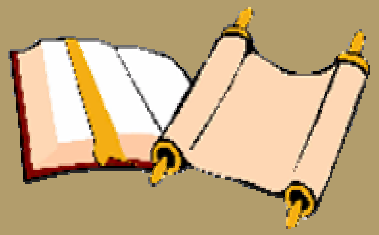
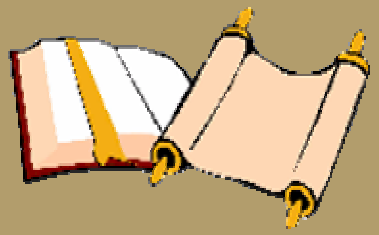
transferred to the Church.

Until repudiated in 1965 by the Second Vatican Council declaration *Nostra Aetate*, supersessionism was taken-for-granted in Christian thought. As 20th-century textbook studies make clear, the many "tendrils" of the anti-Jewish theological system long endured, despite such statements as the Council of Trent's teaching on universal guilt for the crucifixion.



The Turning Point: *Nostra Aetate*, 1965

"[N]either all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. . . . Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ."

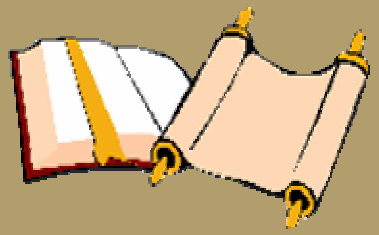


"[T]he church keeps ever before its mind the words of the apostle Paul about his kin: 'they are Israelites and it is for them to be sons and daughters, to them belong the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ' (Rom 9:4,5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. . . .

[T]he apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made."

Some Later Relevant Vatican Documents

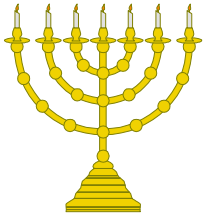
- **Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism**
  - Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 4 (1974)
  - Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching & Teaching in the Roman Catholic Church [1985]
  - We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah [1998]
- **Pontifical Biblical Commission**
  - The Historical Truth of the Gospels [1964]
  - The Bible and Christology [1984]
  - The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church [1993]
  - The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible [2001]
- **Teachings of Pope John Paul II** [1978 - present]

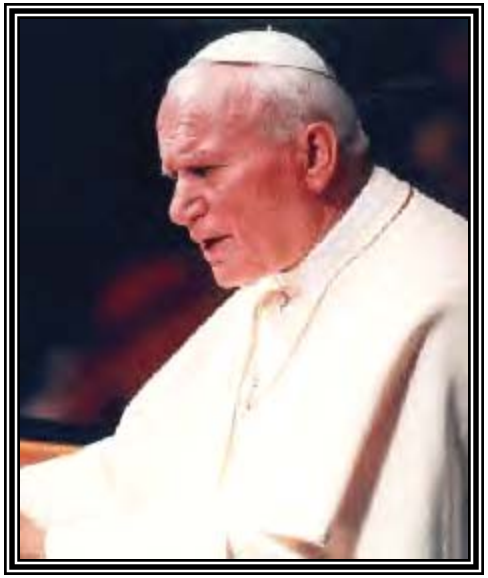


The Teachings of Pope John Paul II

His Holiness' words on Catholic-Jewish relations will be presented in these four categories:

- **Jews and Judaism**

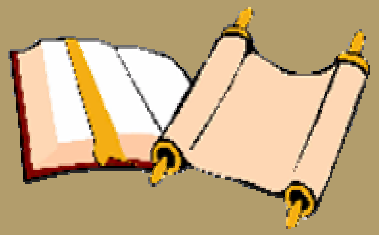


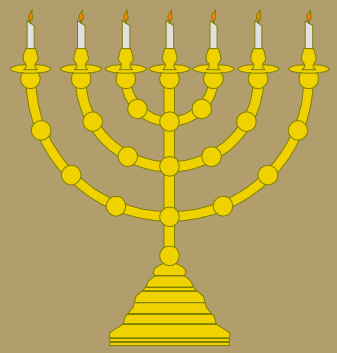


- **Scripture**

- **Jesus**

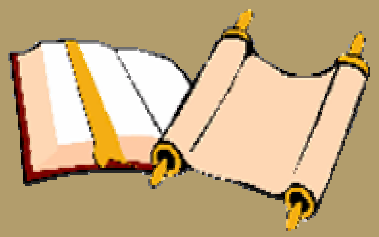
- **The Church**





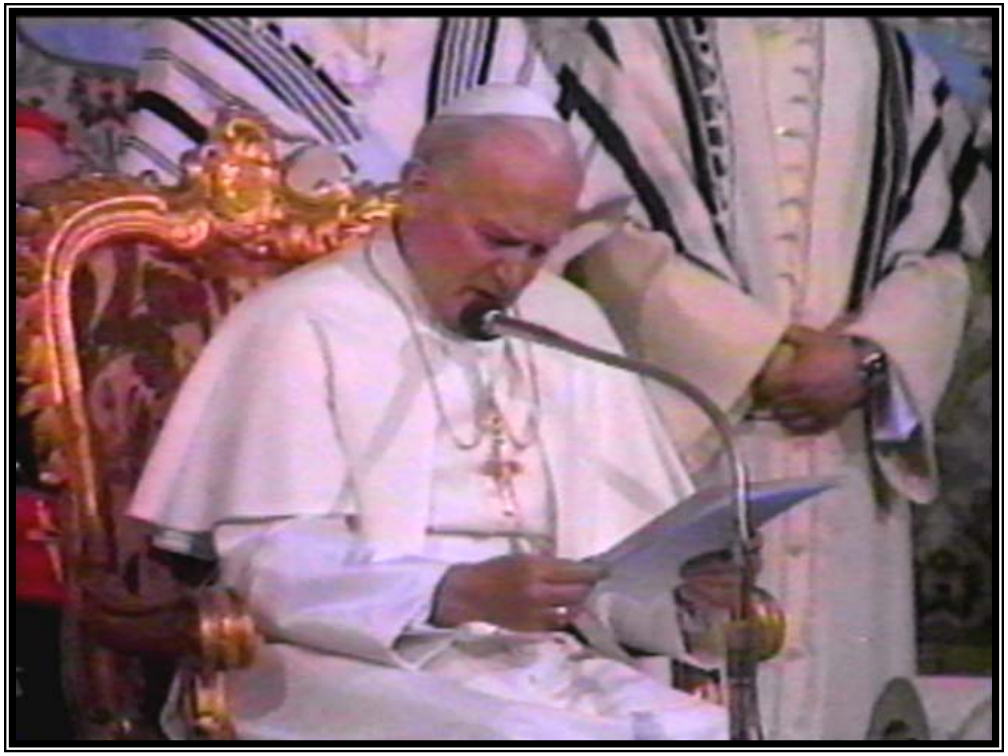
Jews and Judaism

- "[Jews are] the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God . . . . the present-day people of the Covenant concluded with Moses" [Mainz, Nov 17, 1980]
- "[partners] in a covenant of eternal love that was never revoked" [Miami, Sep 11, 1987]
- "The [1974] Guidelines . . . whose value I wish to underline and reaffirm, indicate [that] . . . 'Christians must . . . strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience'" [Rome, Mar 12, 1979].

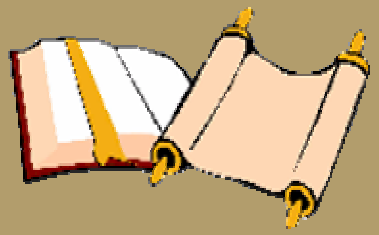


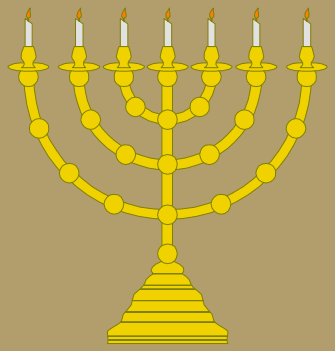
Great Synagogue of Rome

April 13, 1986



"Once again, through myself, the Church, in the words of the well-known Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (no. 4), 'deplores the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and by anyone;' I repeat: 'by anyone.'"

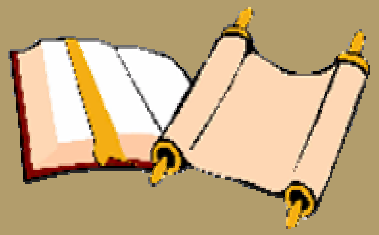


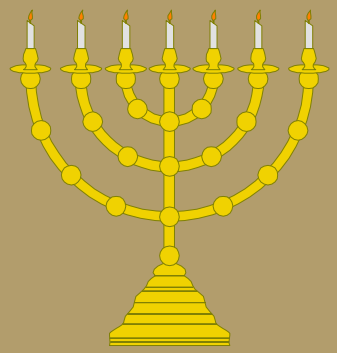


Jews and Judaism

"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 which 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"

[Rome, Apr. 13, 1986).





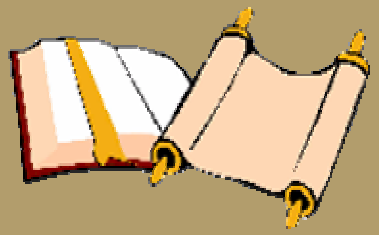
Jews and Judaism

I think that today the nation of Israel . . . finds itself at the center of the attention of the nations of the world, above all because of this terrible experience [the Holocaust], through which you have become a loud warning voice for all humanity, for all nations, all the powers of this world, all systems, and every person. . . . I think that in this sense you continue your particular vocation, showing yourselves to be still the heirs of that election to which God is faithful. This is your mission in the contemporary world before the peoples, the nations, all of humanity, the church. . . . [Our meeting] helps me and all the church to become even more aware of what unites us in the disposition of the divine covenant [Warsaw, June 14, 1987].

Scripture

"In the Christian world . . . erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability [for the crucifixion of Jesus] have circulated for too long, engendering feelings of hostility towards this people."

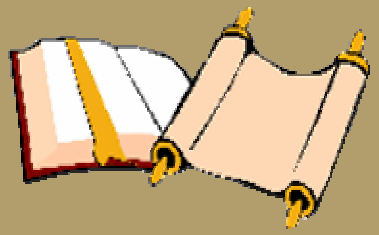
[Rome, Oct. 31, 1997]



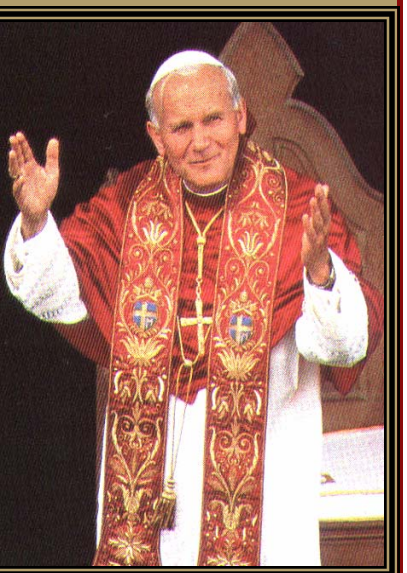
Scripture

"[I]t will continue to be an explicit and very important part of my mission to repeat and emphasize that our attitude to the Jewish religion should be one of the greatest respect, since the Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham. We, too, gratefully hold these same truths of the Jewish heritage and look upon you as our brothers and sisters in the Lord. For the Jewish people themselves, Catholics should have not only respect by also great fraternal love for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable calling. No valid theological justification could ever be found for acts of discrimination or persecution against Jews. In fact, such acts must be held to be sinful."

[Sydney, Nov 26, 1986]



Scripture



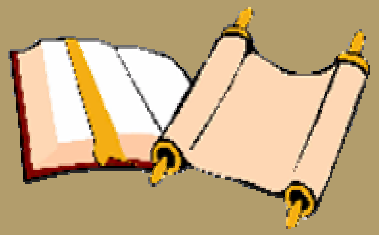
"[T]he ways opened for our collaboration, in the light of our common heritage drawn from the Law and Prophets, are various and important. We wish to recall first of all a collaboration in favor of man, his life from conception until natural death, his dignity, his freedom, his rights, his self-development in a society which is not hostile but friendly and favorable, where justice reigns and where, in this nation, on the various continents and throughout the world, it is peace that rules, the shalom hoped for by the lawmakers, prophets and wise men of Israel"

[Rome, April 13, 1986].

Scripture

"The first dimension of this dialogue, that is, the meeting between the people of God of the Old Covenant, never revoked by God [cf. Rom. 11:29], and that of the New Covenant, is at the same time a dialogue within our Church, that is to say, between the first and the second part of her Bible. In this connection, the directives for the application of the conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate* say: "The effort must be made to understand better everything in the Old Testament that has its own, permanent value . . . since this value is not wiped out by the later interpretation of the New Testament, which, on the contrary, gave the Old Testament its full meaning, so that it is a question rather of reciprocal enlightenment and explanation.'"

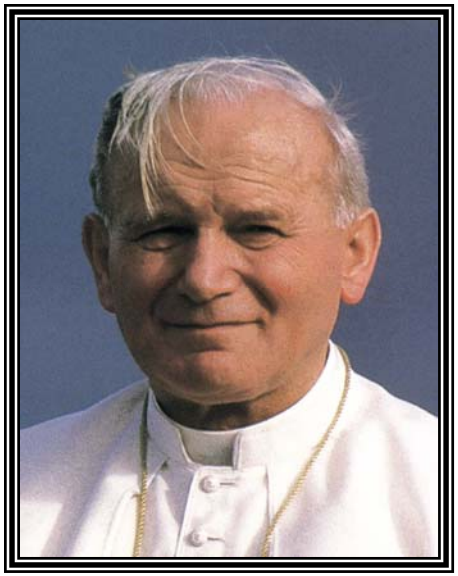
[Mainz, Nov 17, 1980].

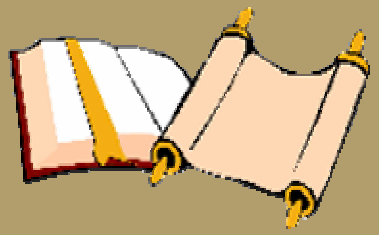


Jesus

" [I]n April of this year, the bishops of the Federal Republic of Germany [stated]: 'Whoever meets Jesus Christ, meets Judaism.' I would like to make these words mine, too"

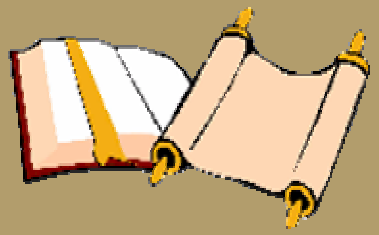
[Mainz, Nov 17, 1980].

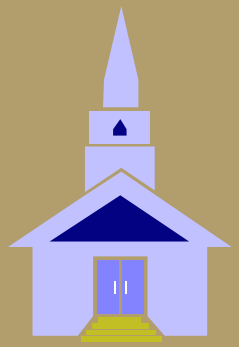




Jesus

"Actually, it is impossible fully to express the mystery of Christ without reference to the Old Testament. Jesus' human identity is determined on the basis of his bond with the people of Israel . . . . And this does not mean only a physical belonging. By taking part in the synagogue celebrations where the Old Testament texts were read and commented on, Jesus also came humanly to know these texts; he nourished his mind and heart with them, using them in prayer and as an inspiration for his actions. Thus he became an authentic son of Israel, deeply rooted in his own people's long history. When he began to preach and teach, he drew abundantly from the treasure of Scripture, enriching this treasure with new inspirations and unexpected initiatives" [Rome, April 11, 1997].



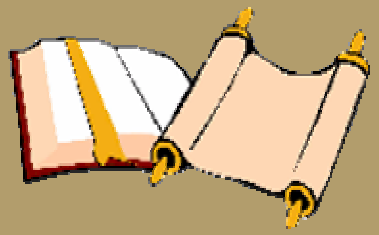


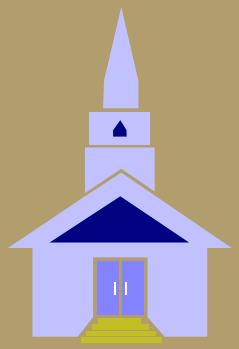
The Church

"For Christians the heavy burden of guilt for the murder of the Jewish people must be an enduring call to repentance; thereby we can overcome every form of anti-Semitism and establish a new relationship with our kindred nation of the Old Covenant . . . .

"Guilt should not oppress and lead to self-agonizing thoughts, but must always be the point of departure for conversion"

[Rome, Nov 8, 1990].





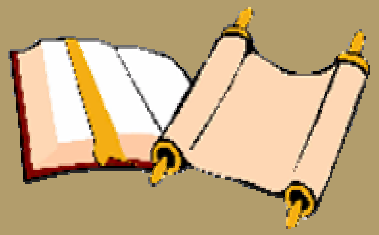
The Church

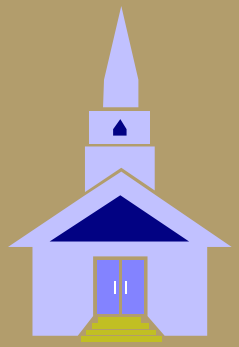
"[O]ur two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities.… [W]e recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed with the Jewish religious community is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration."

[Rome, March 12, 1979]

"[We share] a common commitment for Christians and Jews to get to know one another better, to engage in dialogue, to cooperate intensely in the sphere of human rights, religious education, and the fight against anti-Semitism . . . . we must teach consciences to consider anti-Semitism, and all forms of racism, as sins against God and humanity."

[Budapest, Aug 18, 1991]



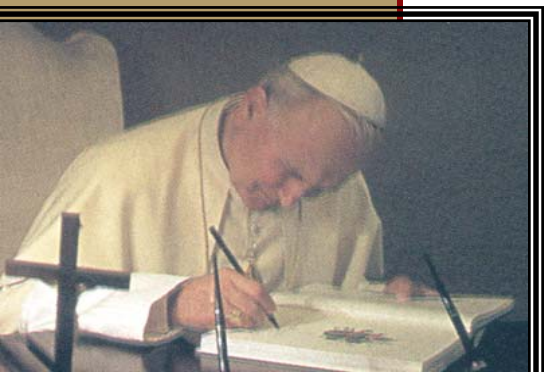


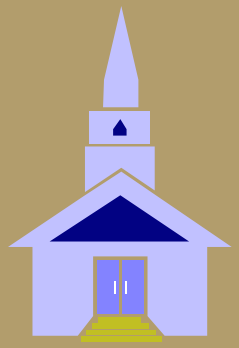
The Church

"Our journey to the year 2000 should take the form of a genuine pursuit of conversion and reconciliation by purifying ourselves of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency and slowness to act. . . . Certainly, it is not enough to make public statements of sorrow for past wrongs.

"We must remind ourselves and the faithful of the radically personal nature of the repentance and conversion required."

[Rome, Oct 23, 1997].

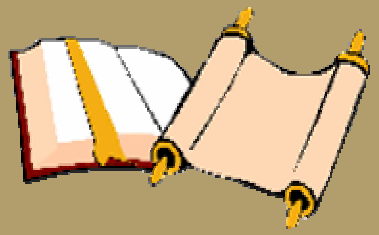


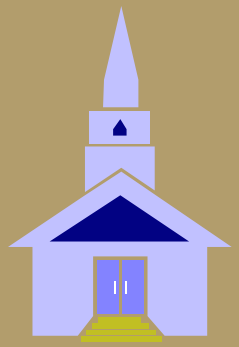


The Church

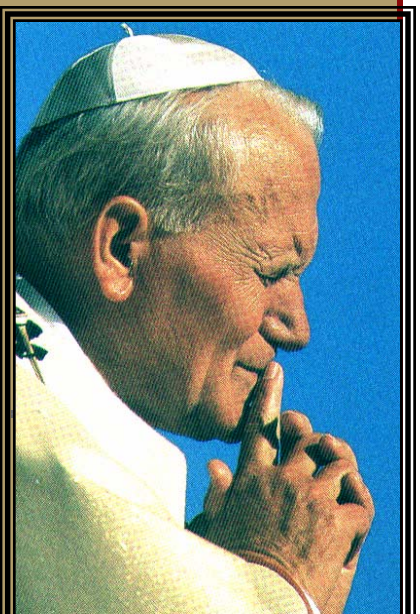
"As we prepare for the beginning of the Third millennium of Christianity, the Church is aware that the joy of a Jubilee is above all the joy that is based on the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God and neighbor. Therefore she encourages her sons and daughters to purify their hearts, through repentance of past errors and infidelities. She calls them to place themselves humbly before the Lord and examine themselves on the responsibility which they too have for the evils of our time."

[Rome, March 16, 1998]



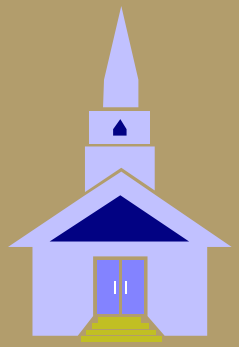


The Church

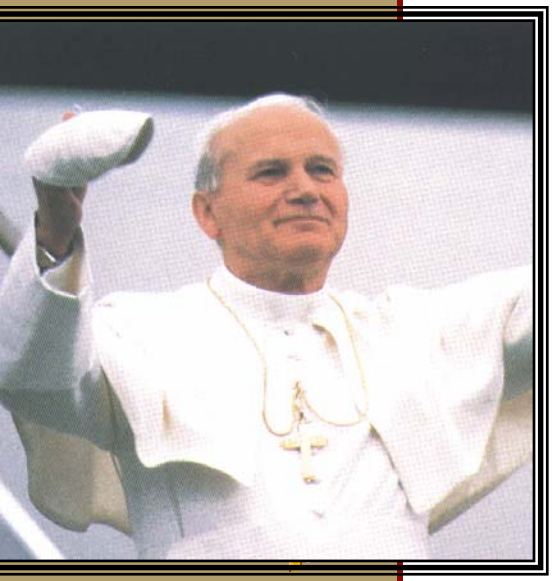


"In virtue of her divine mission, and her very nature, the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world [*Ad Gentes*, 2]. Lest the witness of Catholics to Jesus Christ should give offense to Jews, they must take care to live and spread their Christian faith while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council [*Dignitatis Humanae*]. They will likewise strive to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul -- rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of the divine transcendence -- when faced with the mystery of the incarnate Word"

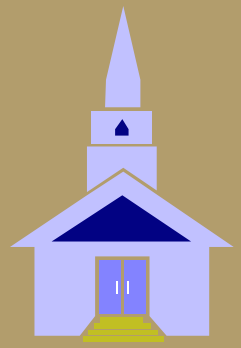
[Rome, March 12, 1979].



The Church



"[T]he links between the Church and the Jewish people are founded on the design of the God of the Covenant. . . . To assess [these links] with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the life of the Church. Such is the case of liturgy whose Jewish roots remain still to be examined in depth, and in any case should be better known and appreciated by our faithful. The same is true of the history of our institutions which, since the beginning of the Church, have been inspired by certain aspects of the synagogue community organization" [Rome, March 6, 1982].



The Church

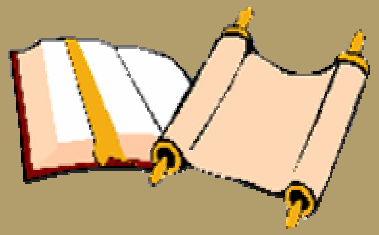
Confession of Sins Against the People of Israel

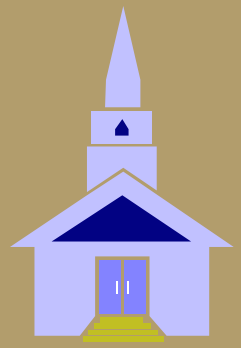
March 12, 2000

Cardinal Edward Cassidy:

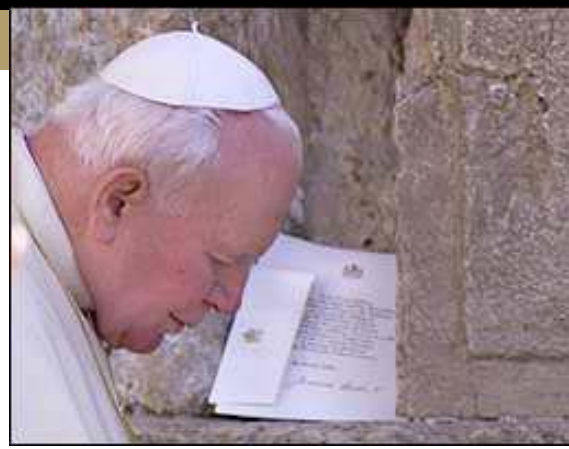
"Let us pray that, in recalling the sufferings endured by the people of Israel throughout history, Christians will acknowledge the sins committed by not a few of their number against the people of the Covenant and the blessings, and in this way will purify their hearts."

Kyrie, eleison, Kyrie, eleison, Kyrie, eleison





The Church



Western Wall Prayer

God of our fathers,

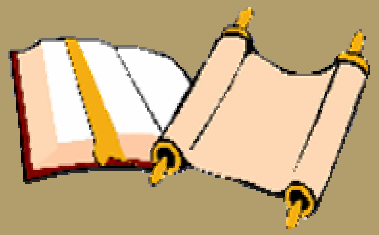
you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring Your name to the nations:

we are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of Yours to suffer

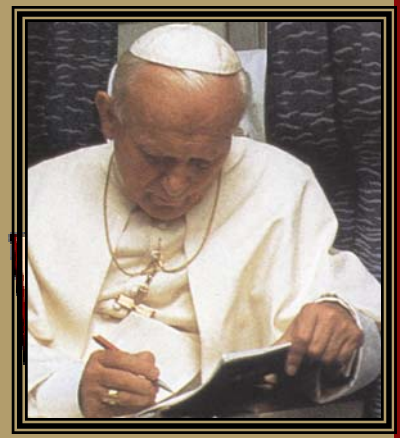
and asking Your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant

Jerusalem, 26 March 2000.

Joannnes Paulus II



Ten Papal Teachings



❶ Jews live in covenant with God.

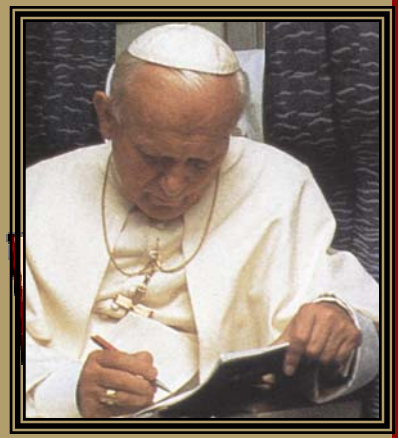
❷ Anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism are sins.

❸ Christian teaching, including misuse of some New Testament texts, has promoted antipathy and violence toward Jews. Conversion is needed.

❹ There exists a divinely-willed ongoing bond between Judaism and Christianity. The path for Christians to follow with Jews is dialogue and collaboration.

❺ Judaism has its own distinctive vocation in the divine plan.

Ten Papal Teachings



❻ Jesus was and always remained a Jew. His humanity cannot be understood apart from this.

❼ Christians must affirm Jewish self-understanding of their own religious experience. This includes a respect for Jewish attachment to the Land of Israel.

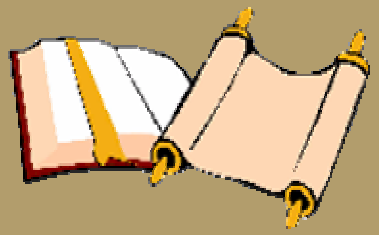
❽ Christians deepen their own faith when they learn from the living faith of contemporary Jews.

❾ The Scriptures of ancient Israel have revelatory value as inspired texts apart from the Church's christological reading of them.

❿ Jews and Christians both have the covenantal responsibility to prepare for the Age to Come.

For further reading

- Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds. *Spiritual Pilgrimage - Pope John Paul II: Texts on Jews and Judaism, 1979-1995* (Crossroad, 1995).
- Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds. *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue* (Orbis, 1999).
- Darcy O'Brien, *The Hidden Pope: The Personal Journey of John Paul II and Jerzy Kluger* (Daybreak, 1998).
- Virgilio Levi and Christine Allison, *John Paul II – A Tribute in Words and Pictures* (Morrow, 1999).

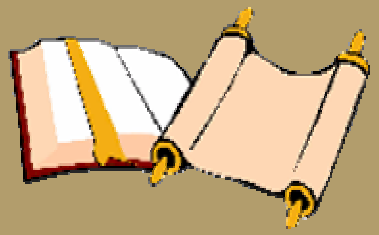


Our thanks to Michael J. Corso for narrating some quotations in this presentation.

"As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world.

This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to first be a blessing to each other."

April 6, 1993



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