



Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Committee for Catholic | 05.03.2000

## **Response to Vatican Holocaust Document March 6, 2000**

### **Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, March 6, 2000**

The Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, is issuing a response to the Vatican document on the Holocaust. "We Remember: a reflection on the Shoah" was published by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1998.

The bishops' Committee welcomes the document's "act of repentance" for the errors and failures of "sons and daughters of the Church" which contributed to the tragedy of the Shoah, and calls on the Church in this country to work more urgently for Christian-Jewish reconciliation.

Bishop Charles Henderson, Chairman of the Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations, said:

"In the Jubilee year 2000, Lent is a particularly appropriate time for us to remember the sins and failures of the past. We hope that our response to "[We Remember: a reflection on the Shoah](#)" will contribute in a positive way to the ongoing dialogue and reconciliation between Catholics and Jews in England and Wales. We must all learn lessons from the past so that a tragedy like the Shoah can never happen again and foundations are well laid for a future of understanding and friendship."

The text of the Committee's response follows.

### **Response of the Committee for Catholic-Jewish Relations to the Vatican Document 'We Remember - A Reflection on the Shoah'**

1. The Committee welcomes the Vatican document, "We remember: a reflection on the Shoah", long promised by Pope John Paul II and in preparation since 1987. This is the first official statement promulgated by the Church about the Shoah (Holocaust) and the part played by Christians.
2. We appreciate the seriousness with which the document deals with the Shoah, and the call for Christians to remember this "unspeakable tragedy". It is a tragedy the Church needs to remember on account of her members' part in it, especially in view of the close relationship between Christianity and Judaism. Failure to remember can lead to a minimising of the Shoah and even a denial that the tragedy ever took place.
3. We endorse the view that the enormity of the Shoah calls for a "moral and religious memory" and, particularly among Christians, a very serious reflection on what gave rise to it. The Church, therefore, must engage in an in-depth study of the history of Christian-Jewish relations, the phenomenon of anti-Semitism and those racist theories which formed the background to the Shoah. The document points out that in the Christian world "erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament engendered feelings of hostility towards the Jewish people" and goes on to describe the development of nationalism which gave rise to an anti-Judaism which was "essentially more sociological and political than religious". This distinction, however, must not be allowed to diminish the importance of the part played by the long tradition of Christian anti-Semitism of which we have

evidence in theology, catechesis, liturgy and art. Nor must the Church lose sight of this aspect of the "tormented" history which calls for continued formation of lay people and clergy.

4. There were many who helped Jews during World War II and they must be remembered and honoured. At the same time there were others who had knowledge of the genocide being perpetrated against the Jewish people and who failed to speak out. Among these were "sons and daughters of the Church" who must necessarily include members of the clergy and the hierarchy. Some remained silent because of fear that their words could lead to further loss of life and others remained silent for less noble reasons.

5. In this document the Church calls for an act of repentance for the failures of her members throughout the ages and particularly with regard to the "heavy burden of conscience" Christians should bear after the Shoah. The Committee urges the Catholic Church in England and Wales to find ways of helping her members to respond to this call.

6. Hoping that it will mark a new beginning in the relationship between Jews and Christians, the document asks the Jewish community to "hear us with open hearts". Unfortunately, media coverage immediately after the document was issued demonstrated that many Jews were disappointed with it. Many of these historical and theological issues raised will need further analysis and fresh approaches before more progress can be made. The description of the Jews bearing "the unique witness to the Holy One of Israel" (the most positive estimation so far in a Vatican document of the role of the Jewish people after the Christ event) shows how much progress has already been made.

7. The Committee begs that the necessary steps be taken to implement the serious call expressed in this important Vatican document on Catholic-Jewish relations so that the tragedy of the Shoah can never happen again.