



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON THE OCCASION OF THE COLLOQUIUM
ON THE CONCILIAR DECLARATION «NOSTRA AETATE»**

Friday, 19 April 1985

Dear Friends,

I am happy to greet you in the Vatican on the occasion of the Colloquium which you have called together to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate”, on the relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, and particularly the section of it dealing with her relations with Judaism.

It is indeed a remarkable occasion, not only because of the commemoration in itself, but also because it happens to bring together Catholics, other Christians, and Jews, through the collaboration of the Theological Faculty of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, the Centro Pro Unione and the “Service International de documentation judéo-chrétienne” (SIDIC). The Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has also agreed to give you its assistance and participation.

In this gathering of such important institutions for the purpose of celebrating “Nostra Aetate”, I see a way of putting into practice one of the main recommendation of the Declaration, where it says that “since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is... so great, this Sacred Synod wishes to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues” (*Nostra Aetate*, 4).

Your Colloquium is one of those “brotherly dialogues”, and it will most certainly contribute to that “mutual understanding and respect” mentioned by the Council.

Jews and Christians must get to know each other better. Not just superficially as people of

different religions, merely coexisting in the same place, but as members of such religions which are so closely linked to one another (Cfr. *ibid.*). This implies that Christians try to know as exactly as possible the distinctive beliefs, religious practices and spirituality of the Jews, and conversely that the Jews try to know the beliefs and practices and spirituality of Christians.

Such seems to be the proper way to dispel prejudices. But also to discover, on the Christian side, the deep Jewish roots of Christianity, and, on the Jewish side, to appreciate better the special way in which the Church, since the day of the Apostles, has read the Old Testament and received the Jewish heritage.

Here we are already in what we Christians call a *theological* field. I see in the programme of your Colloquium that you are dealing with proper theological subjects. I believe this to be a sign of maturity in our relations and a proof that the thrust and practical recommendations of “Nostra Aetate” really do inspire our dialogues. It is hopeful and refreshing to see this done in an encounter commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Declaration.

Common theological studies cannot in fact be envisaged if there is not, on each side, a large measure of mutual trust and deep respect for each other – trust and respect which can only profit and grow from such studies.

You have also faced the question of Jewish and Christian spirituality in the present secularistic context. Yes, in our days one can sometimes have the sad impression of an absence of God and his will from the private and public lives of men and women. When we reflect on such a situation and its tragic consequences for mankind, deprived of its roots in God and therefore of its basic moral orientation, one can only be grateful to the Lord because we believe in him, as Jews and Christians, and we both can say, in the words of Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one God” (*Deut.* 6, 4).

But gratitude soon turns into a commitment to express and publicly profess that faith before the world and to live our lives according to it, so that “men may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven” (*Matth.* 5, 16).

The existence and the providence of the Lord, our Creator and Saviour, are thus made present in the witness of our daily conduct and belief. And this is one of the responses that those who believe in God and are prepared to “sanctify his name” (Cfr. *ibid.* 6, 9) can and should give to the secularistic climate of the present day.

A commemorative Colloquium thus easily becomes a point of departure for a new and strong dedication, not only to ever deeper relations between Jews and Christians in many fields, but also to what man needs most in the present world: a sense of God as a loving Father and of his saving will.

It is in this context that I note the reference in your programme to the catastrophe which so cruelly decimated the Jewish people, before and during the war, especially in the death camps. I am well aware that the traditional date for such a commemoration falls about now. It is precisely an absence of faith in God and, as a consequence, of love and respect for our fellow men and women, which can easily bring about such disasters. Let us pray together that it will never happen again, and that whatever we do to get to know each other better, to collaborate with one another and to bear witness to the one God and to his will, as expressed in the Decalogue, will help make people still more aware of the abyss which mankind can fall into when we do not acknowledge other people as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of the same heavenly Father.

Jewish-Christians relations are never an academic exercise. They are, on the contrary, part of the very fabric of our religious commitments and our respective vocations as Christians and as Jews. For Christians these relations have special theological and moral dimensions because of the Church's conviction, expressed in the document we are commemorating, that "she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the ancient Covenant, and draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree into which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (Cfr. *Rom.* 11, 17-24)" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). To commemorate the anniversary of "Nostra Aetate" is to become still more conscious of all these dimensions and to translate them into daily practice everywhere.

I earnestly hope for this and pray that the work of your organizations and institutions in the field of Jewish-Christian relations will be ever more blessed by the Lord, whose name is forever to be praised: "Great is the Lord and highly to be praised" (*Ps.* 145, 3).

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