



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE**

*Friday, 16 March 1990*

*Mr President,  
Distinguished Members of the American Jewish Committee,*

1. Shalom! This is my greeting to each of you as I welcome you to the Vatican. Our meeting today reminds me of a similar visit of the *American Jewish Committee* in 1985 for the purpose of commemorating the twentieth anniversary of "Nostra Aetate", the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. That Declaration does not cease to impart an important and timely message, inspiring us with hope and promise for the future.

Although the Catholic teaching concerning Jews and Judaism is summarized in Article Four of the Declaration, many of its fundamental elements are also present in other documents of the Council. References to the same topic can be found in the Dogmatic Constitutions on the Church and on Divine Revelation, in the Declaration on Religious Freedom, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Perhaps the time has come, after twenty-five years, to make a systematic study of the Council's teaching on this matter. We would do well to pursue this as part of our dialogue. Today, I would like to limit myself to some general observations.

2. "Nostra Aetate" speaks of "the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock" (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). This reference is complemented by another text found in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. There we read: "Those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the People of God. In the first place there is the people to whom the covenants and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (Cfr. *Rom.* 9, 4-5). On account of their fathers, this people remains most dear to God, for

God does not repent of the gifts he makes nor of the calls he issues" (Cfr. *ibid.* 11, 28-29). (*Lumen Gentium*, 16).

The origin of our "common spiritual heritage" (Cfr. *Nostra Aetate*, 4), therefore is to be found in the faith of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Within this common heritage we may include veneration of the Holy Scriptures, confession of the One Living God (Cfr. *Ex.* 20, 3. 23; *Deut.* 6, 4), love of neighbour (Cfr. *Lev.* 19, 18), and a prophetic witness to justice and peace. We likewise live in confident expectation of the coming of God's Kingdom, and we pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As a result, we can *effectively work together* in promoting the dignity of every human person and in safeguarding human rights, especially religious freedom. We must also be united in combatting all forms of racial, ethnic or religious discrimination and hatred, including anti-semitism. I am pleased to note the significant level of cooperation that has been achieved in these areas over the past quarter century, and it is my fervent hope that these efforts will continue and increase.

3. In the new and positive atmosphere that has developed since the Council, *among Catholics* it is the task of every local Church to *promote cooperation* between Christians and Jews. As the Successor of Saint Peter, I have a special concern for all the Churches, and I am therefore committed to furthering such a policy throughout the world. At the same time I gratefully acknowledge the initiatives taken by yourselves in this area. I hope that your forthcoming meeting in Poland with the Episcopal Commission for Dialogue with the Jews will be a very fruitful one. May it be a hopeful sign of genuine brotherhood between Christians and Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, and thus contribute to the process of peaceful and democratic development taking place there.

This initiative and the continuing exchange of information between your Committee and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews reflect our *common desire for better understanding and greater harmony*. May this serve to benefit both of our communities and to foster justice and peace in the world, especially in the land of the Fathers and in Jerusalem the Land and the City considered holy by millions of believers: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

May that day come when all nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks", when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (*Is.* 2, 4). Upon all of you I invoke an abundance of divine blessings.

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