

COMMISSION
FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Message of Cardinal Kurt Koch for the “International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations” (IJCIC) on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of “Nostra aetate” (no.4)

28 October 2020

It is with great joy and satisfaction that on 28 October 2020 we commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration “Nostra aetate” (no.4). In order to mark this occasion it is my pleasure to address the “International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations” (IJCIC), which since its foundation in 1970 has been the official partner of the Holy See's “Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews” for promoting and fostering Jewish–Catholic dialogue on the worldwide level. It is without doubt that “Nostra aetate” (no.4) laid the foundation for relations between Catholics and Jews, and can therefore rightly be considered to be the “Magna Carta” of Jewish–Catholic dialogue. It was in pondering the mystery of the Church itself that the Second Vatican Council was drawn to exploring its relationship with the descendants of Abraham. This is a most significant affirmation, for it underlines the fact that it was due neither to a reason that is external to the life of the Church, nor to coincidental or optional motives, that Catholics were inspired to reflect on their bond with the Jewish people, but rather due to its own reflection on the mystery of the Church.

We read in the first verse of Psalm 133: “How good it is, how pleasant, where the people dwell as one!” While the original understanding of the word “people” was exclusively intended as those belonging to the people of Israel, today – after Pope John Paul II spoke of Jews as the elder brothers of Christians, and Pope Benedict XVI as our fathers in faith – we can speak of a community of brothers and sisters among Jews and Christians. We are inseparably linked in the essential foundation of faith in the God of Israel, and we are united by a rich common spiritual heritage and the legacy of a longstanding shared past. Christianity has its roots in Judaism; the latter constitutes the nucleus of its identity. Jesus is and remains a son of the people of Israel; he is shaped by that tradition and, for this reason, can only be truly understood in the perspective of this cultural and religious framework.

The dialogue between Catholics and Jews has made its own this vision, in a spirit of fraternal and authentic friendship. It is with gratitude that I reflect that on the level of daily coexistence, many groups around the globe have emerged aimed at building bridges between Jews and Catholics in the spirit of “Nostra aetate” (no.4). Ultimately, it is a question of gaining deeper mutual understanding, always in the mutual respect of each other's religious traditions, and of nurturing the value of each other. Catholics and Jews should always aim to gain a deeper mutual familiarity. This aspect should never be neglected, particularly in the fields of education and formation.

Originally our “Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews” and IJCIC had the intention to commemorate the 55th anniversary of “Nostra aetate” (no. 4) on the occasion of the “International Catholic–Jewish Liaison Committee” (ILC) Meeting scheduled in São Paulo (Brazil) at the end of October 2020. However, for obvious reasons it was not possible to organize this conference. Yet even if we are not able to meet personally, our contact remains steadfast, attesting to the fact that our friendship is stable and strong. Let us give thanks to God the Eternal and Almighty for these bonds of friendship and for all that has been achieved in the last decades of Jewish–Catholic dialogue.



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