

COMMISSION  
FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

*Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*

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Rabbi David Fox Sandmel  
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Dear Rabbi Sandmel,

I write in response to your letter of 24 August 2021 in which you referred to the catechesis of Pope Francis during the general audience of 11 August in which he reflected on Paul's letter to the Galatians (Gal 3,19.21–22). I am sorry that I could not respond immediately as I wished to consult the Pope himself, who has instructed me to respond to your letter.

In the Holy Father's address, the Torah is not devalued, as he expressly affirms that Paul was not opposed to Mosaic law: indeed, Paul observed this Law, emphasized its divine origin, and attributed to it a role in salvation history. The phrase "The law does not give life, it does not offer the fulfilment of the promise" should not be extrapolated from its context, but must be considered within the overall framework of Pauline theology. The abiding Christian conviction is that Jesus Christ is the new way of salvation. However, this does not mean that the Torah is diminished or no longer recognized as the "way of salvation for Jews". In an audience with the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) on 30 June 2015, Pope Francis affirmed: "The Christian confessions find their unity in Christ; Judaism finds its unity in the Torah. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh in the world; for Jews the Word of God is present above all in the Torah. Both faith traditions find their foundation in the One God, the God of the Covenant, who reveals himself through his Word".

In his catechesis the Holy Father does not make any mention of modern Judaism; the address is a reflection on Pauline theology within the historical context of a given era. The fact that the Torah is crucial for modern Judaism is not questioned in any way.

Bearing in mind the positive affirmations constantly made by Pope Francis on Judaism, it cannot in any way be presumed that he is returning to a so-called "doctrine of contempt". Pope Francis fully respects the foundations of Judaism and always seeks to deepen the bonds of friendship between the two faith traditions. In this context, Pope Francis agrees with the content of the Jewish document "Between Jerusalem and Rome", published in 2017 regarding the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, which stated: "The doctrinal differences are essential and cannot be debated or negotiated; their meaning and importance belong to the international deliberations of the respective faith communities ... However, doctrinal differences do not and may not stand in the way of our peaceful collaboration for the betterment of our shared world and the lives of the children of Noah".

I trust that this response clarifies the theological background of the Holy Father's words.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,



Kurt Cardinal Koch  
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