



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE INTERNATIONAL LEADERS
OF THE «ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE OF B'NAI B'RITH»
(SONS OF THE ALLIANCE)**

Thursday, 22 March 1984

Dear friends,

I am very happy to receive you here in the Vatican. You are a group of national and international leaders of the well-known Jewish Association, based in the United States, but active in many parts of the world, including Rome itself, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. You are also closely related with the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism, founded ten years ago by Paul VI for the purpose of fostering relations, at the level of our respective faith commitment, between the Catholic Church and the Jewish Community.

The mere fact of your visit to me, for which I am grateful, is in itself a proof of the constant development and deepening of such relations. Indeed, when one looks back to the years before the Second Vatican Council and its Declaration "*Nostra Aetate*" and tries to encompass the work done since, one has the feeling that the Lord has done "great things" for us (cf. *Luc* 1, 49). Therefore we are called to join in a heartfelt act of thanksgiving to God. The opening verse of Psalm 133 is appropriate: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity".

Because, my dear friends, as I have often said since the beginning of my pastoral service as Successor of Peter, the Galilean fisherman (cf. Ioannis Pauli PP. II, *Allocutio ad Praesides et Legatos Consociationum Hebraicarum de dialogo inter Christianos et Hebraeos ad universorum hominum utilitatem fovendo*, die 12 mart. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II [1979] 528 ss.), the encounter between Catholics and Jews is not a meeting of two ancient religions each going its own way, and not infrequently, in times past, in grievous and painful conflict. It is a meeting between "brothers", a dialogue, as I said to the Representatives of the German Jewish

community in Mainz (November 11, 1980), "between the first and the second part of the Bible". And as the two parts of the Bible are distinct but closely related, so are the Jewish people and the Catholic Church.

This closeness is to be manifested in many ways. First of all, in the deep respect for each other's identity. The more we know each other, the more we learn to assess and respect our differences.

But then, and this is the great challenge we are called to accept: respect does not mean estrangement, nor is it tantamount to indifference. On the contrary, the respect we speak of is based on the mysterious spiritual link (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 4) which brings us close together, in Abraham and, through Abraham, in God who chose Israel and brought forth the Church from Israel.

This "spiritual link" however involves a great responsibility. Closeness in respect implies trust and frankness, and totally excludes distrust and suspicion. It also calls for fraternal concern for one another and the problems and difficulties with which each of our religious communities is faced.

The Jewish community in general, and your organization in particular, as your name proclaims, are very much concerned with old and new forms of discrimination and violence against Jews and Judaism, ordinarily called anti-Semitism. The Catholic Church, even before the Second Vatican Council (cf. S. Congregatio S. Officii, die 3 mart. 1928; Pii XI, *Allocutio ad belgicos scriptores*, die 6 sept. 1938) condemned such ideology and practice as opposed not only to the Christian profession but also to the dignity of the human person created in the image of God.

But we are not meeting each other just for ourselves. We certainly try to know each other better and to understand better our respective distinctive identity and the close spiritual link between us. But, knowing each other, we discover still more what brings us together for a deeper concern for humanity at large: in areas, to cite but a few, such as hunger, poverty, discrimination wherever it may be found and against whomever it may be directed, and the needs of refugees. And, certainly, the great task of promoting justice and peace (cf. *Ps* 85, 4), the sign of the messianic age in both the Jewish and the Christian tradition, grounded in its turn in the great prophetic heritage. This "spiritual link" between us cannot fail to help us face the great challenge addressed to those who believe that God cares for all people, whom he created in his own image (cf. *Gen* 1, 27).

I see this at the same time as a reality and as a promise of the dialogue between the Catholic Church and Judaism, and of the relations already existing between your organisation and the Commission for Religious Relations with Judaism and with other institutions in some local Churches.

I thank you again for your visit and for your commitment to the goals of dialogue. Let us be grateful

to our God, the Father of us all.

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