



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO THE INTERNATIONAL LIAISON COMMITTEE

Monday, 28 October 1985

Dear friends,

Twenty years to the day after the promulgation of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* by the Second Vatican Council, you have chosen Rome as the venue of the 12th session of the International Liaison Committee between the Catholic Church, represented by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations With Judaism, and the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

Ten years ago, in January 1975, you also met in Rome for the 10th anniversary of the promulgation of the same document. The declaration, in effect, in its fourth section, deals with the relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish religious community. It has been repeatedly said that the content of this section, while not too long nor unduly complicated, was epoch-making and that it changed the existing relationship between the Church and the Jewish people and opened quite a new era in this relationship.

I am happy to affirm here, 20 years later, that the fruits we have reaped since then, and your Committee is one of them, prove the basic truth of these assertions. The Catholic Church is always prepared with the help of God's grace to revise and renew whatever in her attitudes and ways of expression happens to conform less with her own identity, founded upon the word of God, the Old and the New Testament, as read in the church. This she does not out of any expediency nor to gain a practical advantage of any kind, but out of a deep consciousness of her own "mystery" and a renewed willingness to translate it into practice. The declaration affirms, with great precision, that it is while delving into this "mystery" that she, the Church, "remembers the spiritual link" between herself and "Abraham's stock".

It is this "link", which the declaration goes on to explain and illustrate, that is the real foundation for our relation with the Jewish people. A relation which could well be called a real "parentage" and which we have with that religious community alone, notwithstanding our many connections with other world religions, particularly with Islam, and which the declaration appropriately elaborates in other sections. This "link" can be called a "sacred" one, stemming as it does from the mysterious will of God.

Our relations since that historic date could only improve, deepen and branch out in different aspects and levels in the life of the Catholic Church and of the Jewish community. In this connection, as you are well aware, as far back as 1974 the Holy See took the initiative to create a Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and also published, through that same commission, two further documents intended for the application of the declaration to many fields of the Church's life: the 1974 "Guidelines" and the very recent "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Catholic Church".

Both documents are a proof of the Holy See's continued interest in and commitment to this renewed relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and to drawing from it all practical consequences.

Regarding the above-mentioned document, the "Notes" published last June, I am sure that they will greatly help toward freeing our catechetical and religious teaching of a negative or inaccurate presentation of Jews and Judaism in the context of the Catholic faith. They will also help to promote respect, appreciation and indeed love for one and the other, as they are both in the unfathomable design of God, who "does not reject His people" (Ps 94:14; Rm 11:1). By the same token, anti-Semitism in its ugly and sometimes violent manifestations should be completely eradicated. Better still, a positive view of each of our religions, with due respect for the identity of each, will surely emerge, as is already the case in so many places.

To understand our documents correctly and especially the conciliar declaration, a firm grasp of Catholic tradition and Catholic theology is certainly necessary. I would even say that for Catholics, as the "Notes" (no. 25) have asked them to do, to fathom the depths of the extermination of many million Jews during World War II and the wounds thereby inflicted on the consciousness of the Jewish people, theological reflection is also needed. I therefore earnestly hope that study of and reflection on theology will become more and more a part of our exchanges for our mutual benefit even if, quite understandably, some sections of the Jewish community may still have some reservations about such exchanges. However, deep knowledge of and respect for each other's religious identity seem essential for the reaffirmation and strengthening of the "link" the Council spoke about.

The International Liaison Committee which you form is in itself a proof and practical manifestation of this "link". You have met 12 times since 1971 and despite the normal difficulties of adjustment

and even some occasional tensions, you have achieved a rich, varied and frank relationship. I see here present both representatives of many local churches and of several local Jewish communities. Such large representation gathered in Rome for the 20th anniversary of Nostra Aetate is in itself consoling and promising. We have really made much headway in our relations.

In order to follow along the same path, under the eyes of God and with His all-healing blessing, I am sure you will work with ever greater dedication, for constantly deeper mutual knowledge, for even greater interest in the legitimate concerns of each other and especially for collaboration in the many fields where our faith in one God and our common respect for His image in all men and women invite our witness and commitment.

For the work which has been done I give thanks with you to the Lord our God, and for what you are still called to do I offer my prayers and I am happy to reaffirm the commitment of the Catholic Church to this relationship and dialogue with the Jewish community. May the Lord help your good will and your personal and institutional commitment to this important task.