



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH WORLD ORGANIZATIONS

Monday, 12 March 1979 Dear friends, IT IS WITH GREAT PLEASURE that I greet you, presidents and representatives of the Jewish World Organizations, and in that capacity forming with the representatives of the Catholic Church the International Liaison Committee. I greet also the other representatives of various national Jewish Committees who are here with you. Four years ago, my predecessor Paul VI received in audience this same International Committee and told them how he rejoiced that they had decided to meet in Rome, the city which is the centre of the Catholic Church^[1]. Now you have also decided to come to Rome, to greet the new Pope, to meet with members of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and thus to renew and give a fresh impulse to the dialogue which for the past years you have had with authorized representatives of the Catholic Church. This is indeed, therefore, an important moment in the history of our relations, and I am happy to have the occasion to say a word myself on this subject. As your representatives has mentioned, it was the Second Vatican Council with its Declaration "*Nostra Aetate*" ^[2] that provided the starting point for this new and promising phase in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish religious community. In effect, the Council made very clear that, "while searching into the mystery of the Church", it recalled "the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock"^[3]. Thus it understood that our two religious communities are connected and closely related at the very level of their respective religious identities. For " the beginning of (the Church's) faith and election are already found among the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets ", and " therefore she cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant"^[4]. It is on the basis of all this that we recognize with utmost clarity that the path along which we should proceed with the Jewish religious community is one of fraternal dialogue and fruitful collaboration. According to this solemn mandate, the Holy See has sought to provide the instruments for such dialogue and collaboration, and to foster their realization both here at the centre and elsewhere throughout the Church. Thus, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews was created in 1974. At the same time, the dialogue began to develop at several levels in the local Churches around the world and with the Holy See itself. I wish to acknowledge here the friendly response and good will, indeed the cordial initiative, that the Church has found and continues to find among your organizations and other large sections of the Jewish community. I believe that both sides must continue their strong efforts to overcome the difficulties of the past, so as to fulfil God's commandment of love, and to sustain a truly fruitful and fraternal dialogue that contributes to the good of each of the partners involved and to our better service of humanity. The "Guidelines" you have mentioned, whose value I wish to underline and reaffirm, indicate some ways and means to obtain these aims. You have rightly wished to stress a point of particular importance: "

Christians must therefore strive to acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism; they must strive to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience "[5]. Another important reflection is the following: " In virtue of her divine mission, and her very nature, the Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world [6]. Lest the witness of Catholics to Jesus Christ should give offence to Jews, they must take care to live and spread their Christian faith while maintaining the strictest respect for religious liberty in line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council [7]. They will likewise strive to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul – rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of the divine transcendence – when faced with the mystery of the incarnate Word [8]". These recommendations refer, of course, to the Catholic faithful. but I do not think it is superfluous to repeat them here. They help us to have a clear notion of Judaism and Christianity, and of their true mutual relationship. You are here, I believe, to help us in our reflections on Judaism. And I am sure that we find in you, and in the communities you represent, a real and deep disposition to understand Christianity and the Catholic Church in its proper identity today, so that we may work from both sides towards our common aim of overcoming every kind of prejudice and discrimination. In this connection it is useful to refer once more to the Council Declaration "Nostra Aetate" and to repeat what the "Guidelines" say about the repudiation of "all forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination", " as opposed to the very spirit of Christianity ", but " which in any case the dignity of the human person alone would suffice to condemn"[9]. The Catholic Church therefore clearly repudiates in principle and in practice all such violations of human rights wherever they may occur throughout the world. I am, moreover, happy to evoke in your presence today the dedicated and effective work of my predecessor Pius XII on behalf of the Jewish people. And on my part I shall continue with divine help in my pastoral ministry in Rome – as I endeavoured to do in the See of Cracow – to be of assistance to all who suffer or are oppressed in any way. Following also in particular in the footsteps of Paul VI, I intend to foster spiritual dialogue and to do everything in my power for the peace of that land which is holy for you as it is for us, with the hope that the City of Jerusalem will be effectively guaranteed as a centre of harmony for the followers of the three great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity, for whom the City is a revered place of devotion. I am sure that the very fact of this meeting today, which you have so kindly asked to have, is in itself an expression of dialogue and a new step towards that fuller mutual understanding which we are called to achieve. By pursuing this goal we are all sure of being faithful and obedient to the will of God, the God of the Patriarchs and Prophets. To God, then, I would like to turn at the end of these reflections. All of us, Jews and Christians, pray frequently to him with the same prayers, taken from the Book which we both consider to be the Word of God. It is for him to give to both religious communities, so near to each other, that reconciliation and effective love which are at the same time his command and his gift[10]. In this sense, I believe, each time that Jews recite the "Shema' Israel" each time that Christians recall the first and second great commandments, we are, by God's grace, brought nearer to each other. As a sign of the understanding and fraternal love already achieved, let me express again my cordial welcome and greetings to you all with that word so rich in meaning, taken from the Hebrew language, which we Christians also use in our Liturgy: Peace be with you. Shalom,

Shalom!

[1] Pauli VI *Allocutio*, die 10 ianuarii 1975. [2] *Nostra Aetate*, 4. [3] *Ibid.* [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Guidelines*, Prologue. [6] *Ad Gentes*, 2. [7] *Dignitatis Humanae*. [8] *Guidelines*, I. [9] *Guidelines*, Prologue. [10] Cfr. *Lev.* 19, 18; *Marc.* 12, 30. © Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana