



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE COMMISSION
FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DECLARATION "NOSTRA AETATE"***

To My Venerable Brother

Cardinal Walter Kasper

President of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

Forty years have passed since my predecessor Pope Paul VI promulgated the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Church's relation to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*, which opened up a new era of relations with the Jewish People and offered the basis for a sincere theological dialogue. This anniversary gives us abundant reason to express gratitude to Almighty God for the witness of all those who, despite a complex and often painful history, and especially after the tragic experience of the Shoah, which was inspired by a neo-pagan racist ideology, worked courageously to foster reconciliation and improved understanding between Christians and Jews.

In laying the foundations for a renewed relationship between the Jewish People and the Church, *Nostra Aetate* stressed the need to overcome past prejudices, misunderstandings, indifference, and the language of contempt and hostility. The Declaration has been the occasion of greater mutual understanding and respect, cooperation and, often, friendship between Catholics and Jews. It has also challenged them to recognize their shared spiritual roots and to appreciate their rich heritage of faith in the One God, maker of heaven and earth, who established his covenant with the Chosen People, revealed his commandments and taught hope in those messianic promises which give confidence and comfort in the struggles of life.

On this anniversary, as we look back over four decades of fruitful contacts between the Church and the Jewish People, we need to renew our commitment to the work that yet remains to be

done. In this regard, from the first days of my Pontificate and in a particular way during my recent visit to the Synagogue in Cologne, I have expressed my own firm determination to walk in the footsteps traced by my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II. The Jewish-Christian dialogue must continue to enrich and deepen the bonds of friendship which have developed, while preaching and catechesis must be committed to ensuring that our mutual relations are presented in the light of the principles set forth by the Council. As we look to the future, I express my hope that both in theological dialogue and in everyday contacts and collaboration, Christians and Jews will offer an ever more compelling shared witness to the One God and his commandments, the sanctity of life, the promotion of human dignity, the rights of the family and the need to build a world of justice, reconciliation and peace for future generations.

On this anniversary I assure you of my prayers for you and your associates, and for all those who have committed themselves to fostering increased understanding and cooperation between Christians and Jews in accordance with the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*. Upon all of you I cordially invoke God's blessings of wisdom, joy and peace.

From the Vatican, 26 October 2005

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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