



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER PAUL VI BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND WORLD JUDAISM

Friday, 10 January 1975

Gentlemen,

You, the Catholic and Jewish members of the Liaison Committee between the Catholic Church and World Judaism, decided a little over a year ago in Anvers, to hold your fourth annual meeting in Rome. We rejoice in this decision of yours to meet this time in the city which is the centre of the Catholic Church: it has made possible today's fraternal meeting.

Your session is taking place a short time after we have set up, last October, a Commission of the Catholic Church for religious relations with the Jews, the first important act of which has been the publication a few days ago of the "Guidelines and Suggestions" for the application of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* in the sphere of Jewish-Catholic relations.

We will not return at this moment to the details of that document, which was addressed to the faithful of the Catholic Church by the central authority of the Church and which has doubtless been, together with the question of human rights and still other problems, one of the objects of study and shared reflection to which your session has been devoted.

This text evokes the difficulties and confrontations, with all the regrettable elements involved, which have marked relations between Christians and Jews over the past two thousand years. While this reminder has been salutary and indispensable, one should not forget that there have also been between us down the centuries elements other than confrontations. There are still many people who can witness to what was done by the Catholic Church during the last war, in Rome itself, under the energetic impulse of Pius XII as we personally testify and by numerous bishops, priests and members of the faithful, to save innocent Jews from persecution, often at the peril of their own lives.

Moreover, as we look at history as a whole, we cannot fail to note the connections, often too little remarked upon, between Jewish thought and Christian thought. We may here merely recall the influence exercised at various periods in the most exalted spheres of Christian reflection by the thought of the great Philo of Alexandria, who was considered by Saint Jerome as "the most expert among the Jews", a judgment echoed by, among others, the Franciscan Doctor Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. But, precisely, since the Catholic Church has just commemorated, at the same time as the seventh centenary of the death of Saint Bonaventura of Bagnoregio, that of the philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas, who died, like Bonaventure, in the year 1274, there very naturally come to our mind the numerous references of our Angelic Doctor to the work of the rabbinic scholar from Cordoba, who died in Egypt at the dawn of the thirteenth century, Moshe ben Maimon, in particular his explanations of the Mosaic Law and the precepts of Judaism.

For his part, the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas was to expand in its turn in the scholarly tradition of mediaeval Judaism: as has been shown for example by the studies of Professor Charles Touati of the School of Higher Studies in Paris and by Professor Joseph Sermoneta of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, there existed in the Latin West at the end of the thirteenth and in the fourteenth century, a whole Jewish Thomistic school.

These are merely some examples drawn from many others. They bear witness to the fact that at different periods and at a certain level there has been a real and profound mutual esteem and a conviction that we had something to learn from one another.

We formulate, gentlemen, the sincere wish that, in a manner appropriate to our age and thus in a field that to some extent exceeds the limited domain of merely speculative and rational exchanges, a true dialogue may be established between Judaism and Christianity.

Your presence here as some of the most authoritative representatives of world Judaism bears witness to the fact that this personal wish finds a certain echo in yourselves. The terms with which we express it, the presence of the devoted Cardinal President of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, that of our brothers in the episcopate, the Archbishop of Marseilles and the Bishop of Brooklyn, are dear indications to you of the sincerity and collegial decision with which the Catholic Church desires that there should develop at this time that dialogue with Judaism to which the Second Vatican Council invited us by its Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (cf. no. 4).

We hope that this dialogue, conducted with great mutual respect, will help us to know one another better and will lead us all to know better the Almighty, the Eternal One, to follow more faithfully the ways that have been traced out for us by him who, in the words of the prophet Hosea (11:9), is in our midst as the Holy One, who takes no pleasure in destroying.

We dare to think that the recent solemn reaffirmation of rejection by the Catholic Church of every

form of antisemitism and the invitation that we have extended to all the faithful of the Catholic Church to pay heed in order "to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience" may, on the Catholic side, provide the conditions for beneficial development.

We do not doubt that you on your part will correspond, according to your own perspectives, to our effort, which can only have meaning and fruitfulness in reciprocity.

In the perspective of understanding and friendship which we evoked before the Sacred College on 23 December last, we formulate for you here present, gentlemen, and for your families, but more widely still for the entire Jewish people our best wishes of happiness and peace.