



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF THE DECLARATION "NOSTRA AETATE"**

*Consistory Hall
Thursday, 6 December 1990*

*Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Visitors,*

1. As Delegates of the *International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations* and *Members of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews*, you have come together to commemorate the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration "Nostra Aetate". In effect, what you are celebrating is nothing other than the divine mercy which is guiding Christians and Jews to mutual awareness, respect, cooperation and solidarity. Conscious of our sharing in the same hope and promises made to Abraham and to his descendants, I am indeed pleased to welcome you in this house! "*Baruch ha-ba be-Shem Adonai!*": "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (Ps. 119 [118]:26).

2. The brief but significant Document "Nostra Aetate" occupied an important place in the work of the Council. After a quarter of a century it has lost none of its vigour. The strength of the Document and its abiding interest derive from the fact that it speaks to all peoples and about all peoples from a religious perspective, a perspective which is the deepest and most mysterious of the many dimensions of the human person, the image of the Creator (Cf. Gen. 1:26).

The universal openness of "Nostra Aetate", however, is anchored in and takes its orientation from *a high sense of the absolute singularity of God's choice of a particular people*, "His own" people, Israel according to the flesh, already called "God's Church" (Lumen Gentium, 9; cf. Ne. 13:1; Num. 20:4; Deut. 23:1 ff.). Thus the Church's reflection on her mission and on her very nature is

intrinsically linked with her reflection on the stock of Abraham and on the nature of the Jewish people (Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 4). The Church is fully aware that Sacred Scripture bears witness that the *Jewish people*, this community of faith and custodian of a tradition thousands of years old, *is an intimate part of the "mystery" of revelation and of salvation*. In our own times many Catholic writers have spoken of that "mystery" which is the Jewish people: among them Geremia Bonomelli, Jacques Maritain and Thomas Merton.

The Church therefore, particularly through her Biblical scholars and theologians, but also through the work of other writers, artists and catechists, continues to reflect upon and express more thoroughly her own thinking on the mystery of this people. I am happy that the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews is intensely promoting study on this theme in a theological and exegetical context.

3. When we consider Jewish tradition we see how profoundly you venerate Sacred Scripture, the *Migra*, and in particular the *Torah*. You live in a special relationship with the *Torah*, the living teaching of the living God. You study it with love in the *Talmud Torah*, so as to put it into practice with joy. Its teaching on love, on justice and on the law is reiterated in the Prophets - *Nevi'im*, and in the *Ketuvim*. God, his holy *Torah*, the synagogal liturgy and family traditions, the Land of holiness, are surely what characterize your people from the religious point of view. And these are things that constitute the foundation of our dialogue and of our cooperation.

At the centre of the Holy Land, almost as its hallowed heart, lies *Jerusalem*. It is a City holy to three great religions, to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Its very name evokes peace. I should like you to join in praying daily for peace, justice and respect for the fundamental human and religious rights of the three peoples, the three communities of faith who inhabit that beloved Land.

4. No dialogue between Christians and Jews can overlook the painful and terrible experience of the *Shoah*. During the meeting at Prague in September of this year, the Jewish-Catholic International Liaison Committee considered at length the religious and historical dimensions of the Shoah and of anti-Semitism, and came to conclusions that are of great importance for the continuation of our dialogue and cooperation. It is my hope that these may be widely recognized and that the recommendations then formulated will be implemented wherever human and religious rights are violated.

May God grant that the commemoration of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of "*Nostra Aetate*" will bring fresh results of spiritual and moral renewal for us and for the world. May it bring above all the fruit of *cooperation in promoting justice and peace*. In the Babylonian Talmud we read: "The world stands upon the single column that is the just man" (Hagigah, 12b). In the Gospel, Jesus Christ tells us that blessed are the peacemakers (Cf. Matt. 5:9). May justice and peace fill our hearts and guide our steps towards the fullness of redemption for all peoples and for the whole universe. May God hear our prayers!

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