



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO A SYMPOSIUM ON THE
ROOTS OF ANTI-JUDAISM**

Friday, 31 October 1997

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Friends,*

1. I am pleased to receive you during your symposium on the roots of anti-Judaism. I especially greet Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, who is presiding over your work. I thank you for having devoted these days to a theological study of great importance.

Your colloquium is in keeping with preparations for the Great Jubilee, for which I have invited the sons and daughters of the Church to assess the past millennium, especially our century, in the spirit of a necessary "examination of conscience", on the threshold of what should be a time of conversion and reconciliation (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nn. 27-35).

The subject of your symposium is the correct theological interpretation of the relations between the Church of Christ and the Jewish people. The Council's Declaration *Nostra aetate* laid the foundations for this and I myself, in exercising my Magisterium, have had occasion several times to speak on them. In fact, in the Christian world — I do not say on the part of the Church as such — erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people and their alleged culpability have circulated for too long, engendering feelings of hostility towards this people. They contributed to the lulling of consciences, so that when the wave of persecutions inspired by a pagan anti-Semitism, which in essence is equivalent to an anti-Christianity, swept across Europe, alongside Christians who did everything to save the persecuted even at the risk of

their lives, the spiritual resistance of many was not what humanity rightfully expected from the disciples of Christ. Your lucid examination of the past, in view of a purification of memory, is particularly appropriate for clearly showing that anti-Semitism has no justification and is absolutely reprehensible.

Your work complements the reflection conducted particularly by the *Commission for Religious Relations with Jews*, expressed, among other ways, in the [Guidelines of 1 December 1974](#) (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 16 January 1975, pp. 3-4) and in the [Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church](#) of 24 June 1985 (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 24 June 1985, pp. 6-7). I appreciate the fact that your symposium intends to conduct its theological research with great scholarly rigour, in the conviction that to serve the truth is to serve Christ himself and his Church.

2. In the closing chapters of his *Letter to the Romans* (ch. 9-11), in which he gives us crucial insights into the destiny of Israel according to God's plan, the Apostle Paul raises a resounding song of adoration: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom 11:33). In Paul's ardent soul, this hymn echoes the principle he had just stated and which is in a way the central theme of the whole Epistle: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (*ibid.*, 11:32). Salvation history, even when its events seem disconcerting to us, is guided by the mercy of the One who came to save what was lost. An attitude of adoration before the unfathomable depths of God's loving Providence allows only a glimpse of what is a mystery of faith.

3. The fact of divine election is at the origin of this small people situated between the great pagan empires whose brilliant culture overshadowed them. This people was gathered together and led by God, the Creator of heaven and earth. Thus its existence is not a mere fact of nature or culture, in the sense that through culture man displays the resources of his own nature. It is a supernatural fact. This people perseveres in spite of everything because they are the people of the Covenant, and despite human infidelities, the Lord is faithful to his Covenant. To ignore this primary fact is to embark on the way of a Marcionism against which the Church immediately and vigorously reacted, in the awareness of her vital link with the Old Testament, without which the New Testament itself would be emptied of its meaning. The Scriptures cannot be separated from the people and its history, which leads to Christ, the promised and awaited Messiah, the Son of God made man. The Church ceaselessly confesses this fact, when in her liturgy she recites the psalms each day, as well as the canticles of Zechariah, the Virgin Mary and Simeon (cf. Ps 132:17; Lk 1:46-55; 1:68-79; 2:29-32).

That is why those who regard the fact that Jesus was a Jew and that his milieu was the Jewish world as mere cultural accidents, for which one could substitute another religious tradition from which the Lord's person could be separated without losing its identity, not only ignore the meaning of salvation history, but more radically challenge the very truth of the Incarnation and make a

genuine concept of inculturation impossible.

4. On the basis of what has just been said, we can draw some conclusions for guiding the attitude of Christians and the work of theologians. The Church firmly condemns all forms of genocide, as well as the racist theories that have inspired them and have claimed to justify them. One may recall Pius XI's Encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937) and Pius XII's *Summi Pontificatus* (1939); the latter cited the law of human solidarity and of charity towards every individual, regardless of the people to which he belongs. Racism is thus a negation of the deepest identity of the human being, who is a person created in the image and likeness of God. To the moral evil of any genocide the *Shoah* adds the evil of a hatred that attacks God's saving plan for history. The Church knows that this hatred is also aimed directly at her.

From St Paul's teaching in the *Letter to the Romans* we learn those fraternal sentiments, rooted in faith, that we must feel towards the children of Israel (cf. Rom 9:4-5). The Apostle stresses: "For the sake of their forefathers", they are beloved of God, whose gifts and call are irrevocable (cf. Rom 11:28-29).

5. Be assured of my gratitude for the work you are doing on a very important theme that deeply concerns me. You are thus helping to further the dialogue between Catholics and Jews, which we are pleased to note has taken a new, positive direction in recent decades.

I express my best wishes to you and your loved ones, and I willingly grant you my Apostolic Blessing.

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Copyright © Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana