



ICCI Rome Conference 2015

The 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*:
The Past, Present and Future of the Christian-Jewish Relationship

50° anniversario della Dichiarazione conciliare *Nostra Aetate*:
passato, presente e futuro delle relazioni ebraico-cristiane

Opening Session

on Sunday, June 28, 2015 – 17 hrs. in the Pontifical University Urbaniana

Greetings

(translated by Murray Watson)

Marco Cassuto Morselli

(President of AEC Roma)

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies and dear friends,

Rome's "Amicizia ebraico-cristiana" would like to express its gratitude to the "International Council of Christians and Jews" for choosing to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* here in Rome. For nearly a year, we have worked, in collaboration with many of our friends, as well as with other institutions and associations—to whom we wish to express our deepest appreciation—and now the big day has arrived. To all of you, who have come from so many parts of the world, we offer you a warm welcome!

Last April, Rome's Jewish community lost the man who had served as its Chief Rabbi for 50 years. Throughout his nearly century-long life, Rav Elio Toaff (1915-2015) was able to offer a contribution to Jewish-Christian dialogue which will not be forgotten. Our thoughts turn to him in a spirit of gratitude.

Nostra Aetate, in qua genus humanum in dies arctius unitur ... "In our time, when day by day the human family is being drawn closer together....". *Mysterium Ecclesiae perscrutans*: "As this sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to the family of Abraham" ... The Church remembers Israel, and remembers that to the Jews belong the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises and the Patriarchs. The Church remembers that Jesus, Mary and the apostles were Jewish, as were very many of the first disciples who announced the Gospel to the world. The Church awaits that day when all peoples will acclaim the Lord with one voice, and will all serve Him with one yoke¹ (*Nostra Aetate*, § 4)

Of the sixteen conciliar documents, *Nostra Aetate* is one of the shortest. It is neither a Constitution (either dogmatic or pastoral) nor a Decree, but only a Declaration. And yet it is a text that has produced, and is still producing, the most meaningful effects. A tiny grain of mustard that has become a large bush (as Cardinal Bea once said), or a great tree.

A text that *in our time* is being considered anew, in order to better understand in what sense the Church—the Churches—are the *new* people of G-d (while avoiding the theology of substitution), in such a way that the *new* covenant is linked to the covenant with Israel, never revoked, and examining what consequences might flow from such a new framework. We shall speak about this in the days ahead, the days of our conference, which is being opened, by two distinguished speakers, whom we are about to listen to: Cardinal Beteri and Rabbi Skorka.

Today, more than ever, religions have a vital role to play on a planet-wide scale. A vital role—in favour of life and not death. The words which the Holy One—blessed be He—addressed to Moses show how eminently

¹ "At that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him with one accord [literally, 'with one shoulder']" (Zephaniah 3:9)

contemporary they are: "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live" (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 30:19*)

As Jews and Christians, we must acknowledge the religious, ethical and existential values which we have in common, and place them at the service of all of humanity. Jewish-Christian dialogue is an essential stage in interreligious dialogue, but not one that is closed in on itself. It also provides an opening to dialogue with Islam and all great religious traditions, as even the origins of the text of *Nostra Aetate* demonstrate.

"We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any human being, created as each one is in the image of God" (*Nostra Aetate* §5). Universal brotherhood is not an abstract universalism, but it means respecting, loving and helping every human being—to be what they are, as they are, with respect for every type of difference, adhering to the conditions that the Jewish tradition associates with the generation that survived the Flood, among which the first and foremost is: You shall not kill.

If the witness of the nations is not, in future, to be characterized by contempt or substitution, if it is not Israel's exile and enslavement that are to be proclaimed, but rather its return and its liberation, then it is possible that Judaism will no longer consider Christianity as an antagonistic religion against which it must defend itself, but as a sign of the drawing near of the time of the Messiah,

Let me conclude with the prophetic words of *Yeshayàhu* (Isaiah) regarding the messianic peace: "In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord ... He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of *Yaakov/Jacob*, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!" (*Yeshayàhu/ Isaiah 2:2-5*)

The President of the Republic has conferred his medal upon our conference.

In addition, we have received messages with greetings from the President of the Senate (Pietro Grasso), from the President of the Office for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Italian Bishops Conference (Bishop Bruno Forte) and from the Moderator of the Waldensian leadership (Pastor Eugenio Bernardini).

For reasons for brevity, we will not read them out now, but they will be available in the coming days on our Web site, and they will be published in the final conference report.