2. Religious Relations with the Jews

Ecumenism & Interreligious Dialogue

History

- Scripture
  - *Galatians*
  - *Romans*
  - *Gospel of John*
- Treatment of Jews in the Middle Ages
  - Thomas Aquinas
  - Pogroms
  - Crusades
  - Inquisition
- Modern times
  - Anti-Jewish sentiment
  - Holocaust
  - State of Israel

Recent Official Statements

- *Nostra Aetate* 4-5
  - Continuity of the Church and Israel.
    - The Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy made the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles (cf. Romans 11: 17-24). Indeed, the Church believes that by his cross Christ, who is our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making the two one in himself (cf. Ephesians 2:14-16).
  - The Church sprang from the Jewish people, both Jesus and the apostles.
  - God still holds a covenant with Israel.
    - As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation (cf. Luke 19:44), nor did the Jews, in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed, not a few of them opposed its dissemination (cf. Romans 11:28). Nevertheless, now as before, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their fathers; he does not repent of the gifts he makes or of the calls he issues—such is the witness of the Apostle (cf. Romans 11:28-29; also cf. LG).
  - Mutual understanding and esteem is encouraged.
  - The Jews cannot be blamed for the death of Christ.
  - There should be no persecution of Jews.
  - Respect for all persons.
    - Besides, Christ underwent his passion and death freely and out of infinite love because of the sins of men in order that all might reach salvation. This the Church has always taught and teaches still; it is therefore the duty of the Church to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows. We cannot truly call upon God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any class of people, created as all are in the image of God.
- *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration "Nostra Aetate" (no. 4)* (1974)
    - Christians must strive to acquire better knowledge of the basic components of Judaism
    - Dialogue demands respect for the other as he or she is, in their faith and religious convictions

        - Christians must live and spread their faith while strictly maintaining respect for religious liberty lest they give scandal and offense.
        - Christians should "strive to understand the difficulties which arise for the Jewish soul" rightly imbued with an extremely high, pure notion of divine transcendence—when faced with the mystery of the incarnate Word."
        - Christians should take responsibility for whatever they have truly contributed to Jewish persecution in the past and remove anything that contributes to this in the future.
        - Christians and Jews should together study problems between them and problems in society.
        - Where possible, Christians and Jews should meet together in the presence of God in prayer and silent meditation.
        - The common elements of liturgical life and the Bible should be recognized.
        - "An effort will be made to acquire a better understanding of whatever in the Old Testament retains its own perpetual value (cf. DV 14-15), since that has not been cancelled by the later interpretation of the New Testament."
        - Biblical commentary should emphasize the continuity between the two covenants.
        - Liturgical use of the scriptures should show special sensitivity to those passages about the Jews which might be misunderstood as condemnations of Judaism today.
        - "The problem of Jewish-Christian relations concerns the Church as such, since it is when 'pondering her own mystery' that she encounters the mystery of Israel. Therefore, even in areas where no Jewish communities exist, this remains an important problem. There is also an ecumenical aspect to the question: the very return of Christians to the sources and origins of their faith, grafted on to the earlier Covenant, helps the search for unity in Christ, the cornerstone.
    - "Notes for a Correct Presentation of Jews and Judaism in Catholic Preaching and Catechesis" (1985)
        - Highlights commonalities and differences and repeats some of the admonitions of the previous statement
- *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* (1998)
    - "Before this horrible genocide, which the leaders of nations and Jewish communities themselves found hard to believe at the very moment when it was being mercilessly put into effect, no one can remain indifferent, least of all the Church, by reason of her very close bonds of spiritual kinship with the Jewish people and her remembrance of the injustices of the past."
    - "It was this extreme ideology which became the basis of the measures taken, first to drive the Jews from their homes and then to exterminate them. The *Shoah* was the work of a thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime. Its anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity and, in pursuing its aims, it did not hesitate to oppose the Church and persecute her members also. But it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts. Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive, or even indifferent, to the persecutions launched against the Jews by National Socialism when it reached power? A response would need to be given case by case. To do this, however, it is necessary to know what precisely motivated people in a particular situation."
    - "This, indeed, is the most disconcerting feature of this document: its tendency to credit 'the Church as such' with every good and noble action and to lay the blame for the tragic history of relations between Jews and Christians upon those described as 'the erring sons and daughters of the Church'." (Robert Anderson, "A Critique of the Vatican Statement on the Holocaust", www.jcrelations.net/articl1/anderson2.htm)
- Good Friday prayer language for the Tridentine Rite (2008)
        - Let us pray for the Jews. That our God and Lord enlighten their hearts so that they recognize Jesus Christ, the Savior of all mankind. Let us pray. [kneel in silence; stand]

- Eternal God Almighty, you want all people to be saved and to arrive at the knowledge of the Truth. Graciously grant that when the fullness of nations enters your Church, all Israel will be saved. Through Christ our Lord.

JEWISH RESPONSES

- Welcoming dialogue
  - *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity* by the National Jewish Scholars Project
    - Points of commonality between Jews and Christians
    - Worship the same God
    - Seek authority from the same Book
    - Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel
    - Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of the Torah
    - Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon
    - The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture
    - A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice
    - Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace
- Hesitant about dialogue
  - From Eliezer Berkovits in his "Faith After the Holocaust" (Ktav, 1973, pages 44-50):
    - Emotionally, he argues Jews are not yet ready for dialogue. The Jewish people still mourn in a very personal sense the Holocaust tragedy and the long night of antisemitism which preceded it. They cannot forget the centuries of Christian 'teaching of contempt' that made it possible. Jews who want dialogue at this point are 'Jews without memories.'
    - Philosophically, contact between ideas and ideologies is to be encouraged. But this must be far wider than Jewish-Christian dialogue: "It is the dialogue in the intellectual realm which Judaism has carried on with all cultures and religions at all times."
    - In a theological sense, dialogue is pointless. There is no such thing as a Judeo-Christian tradition. It is true that Christians need to understand Jews and Judaism in order to understand themselves. But for Jewish self-understanding, Christianity is irrelevant. "As far as Jews are concerned, Judaism is fully sufficient. There is nothing in Christianity for them."
    - From the practical point of view, there is a danger that enthusiasts for dialogues can be inexpert and inadequate as spokespeople, lacking knowledge and discernment and too concerned with the public relations aspect of the enterprise. "Dialogue" of this kind is fruitless.
    - Ethically, the dialogue is a "distortion of historic truth": it glosses too easily over a tragic past. It can also be an intellectual distortion, not appreciating that Jewish and Christian interests do not coincide on all issues, and "any close association with Christian thought Y may cripple our ability to articulate the relevance of the specific Jewish position" C and presumably vice-versa. Further, it is unethical to suggest that dialogue with the other makes me respect him: "Human beings ought to treat each other with respect and hold each other dear independently of theological dialogues."

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      Somewhere in the consciousness of most Jews would be an equation like this: "gentiles = persecutors: just leave us alone and don't talk of dialogues. 'Give us neither your honey nor your sting' (Num. R. 20:10)".

      all of the above points are from Raymond Apple, "Christian-Jewish Relations: A Jewish Perspective", found at www.jcrelations.net/articl1/apple.htm

Official Structures

- Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews
  - International Liaison Committee (23 Dec 1970)
  - Within the Council for the Unity of Christians
    - Dialogue with Judaism is at the same time an interChurch dialogue: it is a dialogue within the Scriptures itself. (John Paul II, "Address to Jewish Representatives in Germany", Mainz, 17 November 1980). "The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain way is 'intrinsic' to our own religion." (Address of John Paul II, to Representatives of the Jewish Community in Rome, 13 April 1986)
- International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations
  - American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, Bnai Brith International, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Israel Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations, Orthodox Union, Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbinical Council of America, Union of Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, World Jewish Congress
- Common Statements
  - 40 Years of Dialogue: Reflections and Future Perspectives, International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (Paris, 2 March 2011)
    - Commitment to work together to confront common social issues
  - 20th meeting of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Budapest, 9-12 November 2008
  - The Delegation of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation for Relations with the Catholic Church Bilateral Commission Meeting Statement, Jerusalem, March 11-13, 2007; Adar 21-23, 5767
    - Freedom of Religion and Conscience and its Limits
  - Bilateral Commission Meeting of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation for Relations with the Catholic Church, Rome 26-28 February 2006; 28-30 Shevat 5766
    - Relationship between human life and technology
  - Statement of the Joint Commission to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation for Relations with the Catholic Church and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (19 Oct 04)
    - *A Shared Vision of Social Justice and Ethical Conduct*
  - Joint Declaration of the 18th International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee Meeting (5-8 July 04)
    - Justice and Charity in their theoretical aspects and practical applications
  - Statement of the Joint Commission to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation for Relations with the Catholic Church and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews (3 Dec 03)
    - The Relevance of Central Teachings in the Holy Scriptures Which We Share For Contemporary Society and the Education of Future Generations Accordingly
  - Statement of the Joint Commission for the Jewish-Christian Dialogue (26 Feb 03)
    - How to further peace, harmony and religious values in contemporary societies
  - Statement on the Program of Jewish Studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University (14 Nov 02)
  - Meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (May 01)

Other structures

- Centre Chrétien Pontificale d'Etudes Juives, Pontifical Ratisbonne Institute in Jerusalem
- Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome
- Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies
- Center for the Study of Christianity, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Broader Christian Conversation

- International Council on Christians and Jews
- Consultation on the Church and the Jewish People (WCC)

- Ecumenical Considerations on Jewish-Christian Dialogue (1982)
    - There is a special urgency for Christians to listen and try to understand Judaism on its own terms, its history and traditions, along with its modern form (1.7)

Practical concerns

- Preaching and catechesis (From the *Guidelines on interpreting Nostra Aetate*)
    - The dignity and continued value of God's covenant with Israel should be explained.
    - The continuity between old and new covenants should be emphasized, "without minimizing those elements of Christianity which are original."
    - "The Old Testament and the Jewish tradition founded upon it must not be set against the New Testament in such a way that the former seems to constitute a religion of only justice, fear and legalism, with no appeal to the love of God and neighbour."
    - "With regard to the trial and death of Jesus, the Council recalled that 'what happened in his passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today' (NA 4)."
    - "The history of Judaism did not end with the destruction of Jerusalem, but rather went on to develop a religious tradition. And, although we believe that the importance and meaning of that tradition were deeply affected by the coming of Christ, it is still nonetheless rich in religious values."
- The Holy Land

    "In the Jewish self-understanding, the bond of the people of the covenant to the land is fundamental." (Address of Hon. Philip Klutznick of the Jewish members of the Liaison Catholic/Jewish Committee, to John Paul II, 12 March 1979)

Common points

- Worship the God of Israel
- Bible
- Importance of religious education for human solidarity and harmony (Dec 03)
- Social Justice (Oct 04)
    - respect of different religious identities, assertion of human dignity, rejection of moral relativism, justice and charity for all
- Concern to correct social issues (July 04)
    - economic disparity, ecological devastation, negative effects of globalization, international peacemaking and reconciliation, struggle against terrorism
- Sanctity of Human Life (Feb 03)
- Family Values (Feb 03)
- Liturgy
- Hope in the (second) coming of the Messiah

Basic, paradigmatic differences

- Understanding of God
- Ultimate authority is not the Scripture but the person of Christ in the Church
- Different relationship between culture and faith, between heritage and faith, between land and faith.

Pressing questions

- Is there a mission to the Jews?
- Is it proper to speak of the "Hebrew Bible"?
- In what sense is Christianity the fulfillment of Israel?
- "that according to New Testament and Christian understanding, there is only one salvation through Jesus Christ, but there are two modalities for proclaiming and accepting this salvation, which must be distinguished clearly. In this sense it must also be made clear that the offer to the Jews to recognize in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of Israel cannot simply be equated with Jesus' commission to make all (pagan) nations his disciples (cf. Mt 28:18-20)." – Christof Cardinal Schönborn, "Karfreitagsfürbitte: Israelitische Kultusgemeinde beendet Dialog - Kardinal Schönborn veröffentlicht Klarstellung," *Katholische Nachrichten* (April 17, 2008), translation from http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=3123#9.

RESOURCES

- Vatican website: Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews
  - http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_relations-jews.htm
- Jewish-Christian Relations website
  - http://www.jcrelations.net
- International Council of Christians and Jews
  - http://www.iccj.org/
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