



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE CHIEF RABBIS OF ISRAEL

Friday, 15 September 2005

Distinguished Gentlemen,

With an open heart I welcome you here today, and express my appreciation of the fact that your visit intends to emphasize the positive results that have come from the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate*, the fortieth anniversary of which we are commemorating this year. I see your visit as a further step forward in the process of building deeper religious relations between Catholics and Jews, a course which has received new impulse and energy from *Nostra Aetate* and from the many forms of contact, dialogue and co-operation that have their origin in the principles and spirit of that document. The Church continues to make every effort to implement the Council's vision of a new era of better mutual understanding, respect and solidarity between us.

Nostra Aetate has proven to be a milestone on the road towards reconciliation of Christians with the Jewish people. It makes clear that "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" (N° 4).

Today, we must continue to seek ways to fulfil that responsibility of which I spoke during my recent visit to the Synagogue in Cologne: "of handing down to young people the torch of hope that God has given to Jews and to Christians, so that never again will the forces of evil come to power, and that future generations, with God's help, may be able to build a more just and peaceful world, in which all people have equal rights and are equally at home".

The eyes of the world constantly turn to the Holy Land, the Land that is considered holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Unfortunately our attention is too often drawn by acts of violence and terror, a cause of immense sorrow to everyone living there. We must continue to insist that religion and peace go together.

On this occasion my thoughts turn also to the Christian communities in the Holy Land, a living presence and witness there since the dawn of Christianity through all the vicissitudes of history. Today these brothers and sisters in the faith face new and increasing challenges. While we are pleased that diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel have led to more solid and stable forms of co-operation, we eagerly await the fulfilment of the Fundamental Agreement on issues still outstanding.

Dear Chief Rabbis, as religious leaders we stand before God with a serious responsibility for the teaching we give and the decisions we make. May the Lord sustain us in serving the great cause of promoting the sacredness of human life and defending the human dignity of every person, so that justice and peace may flourish in the world.

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