



# Austrian and Hungarian Christian-Jewish Groups Hold Joint Meeting

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Budapest . On 10-11 September 2003, the board of the Austrian Coordinating Council of Christian-Jewish Cooperation visited the Budapest Christian-Jewish Association. Both organisations are members of the International Council of Christians and Jews. Leading personalities of Hungarian religious communities and churches, such as the Reformed Bishops of Debrecen and Veszeprem, the Lutheran Bishop Imre Szebik and Rabbi Jozsef Schweitzer, attended the meeting.

The president of the Association of Religious Communities in Hungary stated that he visualizes a new era for the Hungarian Jewish communities. The time has come to do everything possible to give the country visible signs of the Jewish religion. He added that Christian-Jewish Associations do not pursue political aims, yet they ought to point out to politicians that much still remains to be done to counter exclusion and denigration of Judaism. Churches could serve as schools for tolerance.

The Catholic theologian Michaly Kranitz spoke of an invitation he had to the Budapest Rabbinic Seminary, which at the time was a deliberate continuation of the Pope's 1986 visit to the synagogue in Rome. He summarized his personal interpretation of the Roman Catholic position since Nostra Aetate with the statement, "We love our Jewish siblings very much and should jointly continue on this path."

The Hungarian Christian-Jewish Association was founded in 1991 by the Catholic theologian and professor for Semitic and biblical languages, Jozsef Szecsi, who emphasized that it was not the task of dialogue to solve problems, but to create an atmosphere of dialogue that allows discussion of the problems. He suggested that Christian-Jewish gatherings were still held in diplomatic ways. Much that was said within the inner circle was not laid open for discussion.

The Association publishes a "Yearbook for Christian-Jewish Theology" with expert contributions from diverse theological disciplines and different religions. The curriculum for teachers and others includes the hope for peace in the Holy Land between the adherents of the Abrahamic religions, gladness about the resumption of diplomatic relations between Hungary and the State of Israel, the

commitment to brotherly/sisterly relations and cooperation with the Jewish communities in Hungary, as well as condemnation of antisemitism and renewal of Christian-Jewish relations.

Helmut Nausner, president of the Austrian Coordinating Council, lectured on the topic "Christians Pray to the God of the Jews." Since the God of Israel is the Lord of the world, he stated, this means that Jews as well as Christians are witnesses of His presence in this world. Eva Petrik, former vice-president of the Coordinating Council, spoke of three steps to overcome traditional borders and prejudices among Christians and Jews: to meet each other, to learn together and from each other, and to act jointly.

The president of the Hungarian Bishops Conference, Archbishop von Eger, also attended the reception given by the Austrian Ambassador in Hungary, Günter Birnbaum. The Ambassador underlined that the Austrian Foreign Ministry views dialog across borders – state as well as religious borders – as an important concern. In the past year the Austrian Cultural Institute in Washington and the Coordinating Council for Christian-Jewish Cooperation have jointly taken on the patronage of Passover celebrations.

The program concluded with a reception by the Jewish community and a guided tour through the Jewish quarter. Musical renderings were given by Cantor Richard Arnes, Jewish vice-president of the Coordinating Council, and Budapest Cantor Lazslo Fekete. Coordinating Council president Helmut Nausner said that he viewed the event as a positive encounter. He stated that the exchange at such a high level has brought to light much commonality and points of contact between the two organisations. It would enrich both countries if the resources could be found to create such future joint projects. Concrete proof had been given, he said, that through such initiatives borders can be overcome in a Europe that is growing closer together.

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English translation by Ruth Weyl