



# On the occasion of the 55th anniversary of “Nostra aetate” (no.4)

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**Messages of Cardinal Kurt Koch and the “International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations” (IJCIC) on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of “Nostra aetate” (no.4)**

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**28 October 2020**

It is with great joy and satisfaction that on 28 October 2020 we commemorate the 55th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration “Nostra aetate” (no.4). In order to mark this occasion it is my pleasure to address the “International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations” (IJCIC), which since its foundation in 1970 has been the official partner of the Holy See's “Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews” for promoting and fostering Jewish–Catholic dialogue on the worldwide level. It is without doubt that “Nostra aetate” (no.4) laid the foundation for relations between Catholics and Jews, and can therefore rightly be considered to be the “Magna Carta” of Jewish-Catholic dialogue. It was in pondering the mystery of the Church itself that the Second Vatican Council was drawn to exploring its relationship with the descendants of Abraham. This is a most significant affirmation, for it underlines the fact that it was due neither to a reason that is external to the life of the Church, nor to coincidental or optional motives, that Catholics were inspired to reflect on their bond with the Jewish people, but rather due to its own reflection on the mystery of the Church.

We read in the first verse of Psalm 133: “How good it is, how pleasant, where the people dwell as one!” While the original understanding of the word “people” was exclusively intended as those belonging to the people of Israel, today - after Pope John Paul II spoke of Jews as the elder brothers of Christians, and Pope Benedict XVI as our fathers in faith - we can speak of a community of brothers and sisters among Jews and Christians. We are inseparably linked in the essential foundation of faith in the God of Israel, and we are united by a rich common spiritual heritage and the legacy of a longstanding shared past. Christianity has its roots in Judaism; the latter constitutes the nucleus of its identity. Jesus is and remains a son of the people of Israel; he is shaped by that tradition and, for this reason, can only be truly understood in the perspective of this cultural and religious framework.

The dialogue between Catholics and Jews has made its own this vision, in a spirit of fraternal and authentic friendship. It is with gratitude that I reflect that on the level of daily coexistence, many groups around the globe have emerged aimed at building bridges between Jews and Catholics in the spirit of “Nostra aetate” (no.4). Ultimately, it is a question of gaining deeper mutual understanding, always in the mutual respect of each other's religious traditions, and of nurturing the value of each other. Catholics and Jews should always aim to gain a deeper mutual familiarity. This aspect should never be neglected, particularly in the fields of education and formation.

Originally our “Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews” and IJCIC had the intention to

commemorate the 55th anniversary of “Nostra aetate” (no. 4) on the occasion of the “International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee” (ILC) Meeting scheduled in São Paulo (Brazil) at the end of October 2020. However, for obvious reasons it was not possible to organize this conference. Yet even if we are not able to meet personally, our contact remains steadfast, attesting to the fact that our friendship is stable and strong. Let us give thanks to God the Eternal and Almighty for these bonds of friendship and for all that has been achieved in the last decades of Jewish–Catholic dialogue.

**Kurt Cardinal Koch, *President to the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews of the Holy See***

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Message to Kurt Cardinal Koch and the Holy See’s Commission for Religious  
Relations with the Jews on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of “Nostra  
aetate” (no.4)**

**28 October 2020**

The International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) joins Kurt Cardinal Koch and the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in joyous commemoration of the 55th anniversary of the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council’s “Nostra aetate” (no. 4), the October 28, 1965 transformative declaration on the Catholic Church’s relationship with the Jewish people.

IJCIC is proud of its 50 years as the official partner of the Catholic Church, representing world Jewry in its vibrant dialogue with the Vatican. The eleven constituent organizations of IJCIC – American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, B’nai B’rith International, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Israeli Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations, Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbinical Council of America, Union for Reform Judaism, Union of Orthodox Congregations of America, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, World Jewish Congress – join together in their ideological and international diversity to advance Catholic-Jewish relations.

“Nostra aetate” (no. 4) is a milestone document articulating the promise of a new and better era in Christian-Jewish relations. It states, “Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.” That aspiration has been realized by the Church’s teachings and initiatives since 1965 that expanded upon “Nostra aetate” (no. 4). It has been dramatically amplified by papal visits to synagogues, to the horrific yet sacred sites of the crimes of the Holocaust, and to the State of Israel following the establishment of Vatican-Israel diplomatic relations in 1993.

Equally important, Jews have welcomed the Church’s outstretched hand and created the religious, communal, and academic structures and responses necessary to partner with Catholics in an era that transformed two millennia of enmity into a blessing of amity. For half a century, Jewish communities across the globe have reached out to Catholics in friendship. IJCIC has been the leader in partnering with the Church, especially through five decades of biennial gatherings of the “International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee” (ILC), when Catholic and Jewish leaders gather in dialogue and address emerging issues.

As important as these formal structures have been, the progress in Catholic-Jewish relations has been elevated by the depth of relationships between Catholic and Jewish leaders and those mirrored by their constituents. Our friendships have assured open and candid communication that are essential in addressing challenging issues. We have experienced and affirmed in our

encounter a shared belief that human beings are created in the Divine image (Genesis 1:27) and our destinies are inextricably linked. As we battle a pandemic that does not distinguish between its victims, these values draw us closer as guideposts for our religious lives.

At a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise and the physical threat to Jewish communities and individuals is very real, we are grateful for the steadfastness of Pope Francis, who has forcefully and repeatedly spoken out against this scourge. Early in his pontificate, when Pope Francis met with IJCIC, he reminded the world of “Nostra aetate” (no. 4)’s firm condemnation of “hatred, persecution and all forms of anti-Semitism.” He added, “Due to our common roots, a Christian cannot be anti-Semitic!”

Likewise, we stand in solidarity with our Christian brothers and sisters as they face serious religious freedom infringements, discrimination and persecution in a number of non-democratic countries across the globe.

On this 55th anniversary we pray for the sustainment and expansion of the reconciliation manifest by “Nostra aetate” (no. 4) and the subsequent decades of Catholic-Jewish partnership. May God bless our endeavors. May our example be a beacon of light to all of humanity.

**Rabbi Noam E. Marans, *Chair, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations***

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