



Presentation of the document “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable”

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Vatican City, 10 December 2015 (VIS) - “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable: a Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic–Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate' (No. 4)” is the title of the document published by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, presented this morning in the Holy See Press Office.

The panel was composed of Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the dicastery; Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish Committee, the theologian Professor Edward Kessler of Cambridge, and Fr. Norbert Hoffmann, S.D.B.

Cardinal Koch recalled that on 28 October this year, in accordance with Pope Francis' wishes, a special general audience was organised to commemorate the promulgation of the Conciliar declaration “Nostra Aetate” exactly fifty years earlier. The audience was attended by numerous representatives of other religions, whose presence demonstrated that the declaration represented a cornerstone in the change in Church's attitude towards other religions. The Commission chaired by the cardinal decided this year to present a new document returning to the theological principles of the fourth part of “Nostra Aetate”, extending and exploring them in further depth where they regard the relations between the Catholic Church and Jews.

He said, “It is an explicitly theological document that intends to retrace and clarify the issues that have emerged during the recent decades of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue. Prior to this text, no other document of a strictly theological nature has been published by our Commission: the three preceding documents, 'Guidelines and suggestions for implementing the Conciliar Declaration “Nostra Aetate” (No. 4)' (1974), 'Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Catholic Church' (1985) and 'We remember: a reflection on the Shoah' (1998), referred mainly to concrete themes, useful for dialogue with Judaism from a practical point of view”.

The new document – summarised below, along with a link to the full text – seeks to emphasise that dialogue with Judaism after fifty years now stands on solid ground, as during this period significant results have been achieved. “We are very grateful for the efforts that have been made by both Jews and Catholics for the promotion of our dialogue”, concluded Cardinal Koch. “But it is very important to remember that, as emphasised in the document and especially from a theological point of view, we are only at a new beginning: many questions remain open and require further study”.

Rabbi Rosen highlighted that the new document shows “not only the advancement of the recommendations of the 1974 Guidelines on 'Nostra Aetate', to appreciate and respect Jewish self-understanding, but also a deepening recognition of the place of the Torah in the life of the Jewish

people and, in accordance with the Pontifical Biblical Commission's work, an acknowledgement of the integrity of Jewish reading of the Bible that is different from the Christian one. Indeed, the very fact that the document also quotes extensively from Jewish rabbinical sources is further testimony of this respect”.

The rabbi also mentioned that, as Cardinal Koch and Fr. Hoffman had already mentioned, “this is a Catholic document reflecting Catholic theology. Inevitably, then, there are passages in it that do not resonate with a Jewish theology”. He notes the importance of appreciating “the centrality that the Land of Israel plays in the historic and contemporary religious life of the Jewish people”.

“Indeed even in terms of the historical survey of the milestones along this remarkable journey since 'Nostra Aetate', the establishment of full bilateral relations between the State of Israel and the Holy See (very much guided and promoted by St. John Paul II) was one of the historic highlights. Moreover, the preamble and the first article of the Fundamental Agreement between the two parties precisely acknowledges this significance. Without 'Nostra Aetate', the establishment of these relations would surely not have been feasible. The Fundamental Agreement not only paved the way for the historic papal pilgrimages to the Holy Land and thus to the establishment of the bilateral commission with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, but arguably reflected more than anything else the fact that the Catholic Church had truly repudiated its portrayal of the Jewish people as condemned wanderers to be homeless until the final advent”.

“The reference to peace in the Holy land as pertinent to the Catholic-Jewish relationship is also important. The peoples there live in mutual alienation and disappointment, and I believe that the Catholic Church can play an important role in rebuilding trust, such as the initiative of prayer for peace taken by Pope Francis. Let me express the hope that there soon will be further initiatives to enable religion to be a source of healing rather than conflict; and to ensure that these are coordinated with those who have the political authority to pave the way to enable the land and the city of peace to fulfil its name”.

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