



Statement in Response to Papal Apology. March 15, 2000

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The International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), umbrella organisation of 31 national dialogue organisations world-wide, acknowledges with respect the historic step taken by Pope John Paul II expressing admission of guilt and apology for sins committed in the past against many groups and communities by the Catholic Church.

In referring specifically to the guilt towards the Jewish people, the Pope stressed once again the particular relationship between the Church and the Jews "the people of the Covenant". This particular relationship was first acknowledged by the Second Vatican Council and reconfirmed by various statements of the Catholic Church. In a veritable revolutionary process - in which Pope John Paul II has played a decisive role - the image of the Jew in the Catholic Church was transformed from that of an alien viewed with contempt and hostility, to one of acceptance of the "older brothers" in kinship and respect.

While the content does not go as far as past statements of the Church, national Bishops' Conferences and Pope John Paul II himself, the significance of the Pope's words lies in the fact that Pope John Paul II spoke on behalf of the community of Catholic Christianity in a liturgical act of contrition for sins committed against the Jewish people,

However, the lack of an unambiguous reference to the Church's guilt in relation to individual groups of victims in this liturgical language of admission of guilt understandably also leads to disappointment and criticism. One would in particular have wished that the document accompanying the act of contrition would have sought further answers to the Church's apparent difficulty in admitting also its institutional historic guilt and responsibility. Not only "Christians" in general, but those responsible throughout the ages in leading the Church must be included in the challenge to humbly seek repentance in teaching and liturgy, "viewing the sins of the past in an authentic purification of memory" leading "to the path of true conversion", "t"shuva ". This is particularly relevant to the history of the Church's anti-Judaism and specifically for the role of the Catholic Church during the Shoah.

Despite these critical reflections we appreciate the unique fact in the history of the Catholic Church and the Papacy that Pope John Paul II clearly signals his wish to lead his Church in admission of guilt and contrition into its new millennium. It is our hope that it will lead to further improvement in the particular relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people in all the world's regions. We also hope that the Vatican's evident endeavour at a lasting new relationship with the Jewish people will reinforce similar endeavours in the non-

Catholic Churches and their readiness for a critical reflection on their own history. There is room for examining the unfinished task of revising teaching and liturgy also in the non-Catholic Churches.

We further hope that this attitude will also lead to lasting closer contacts and improvement in the relationship of the Catholic and the other Christian Churches to the Muslim community. They are all challenged to seek a better, lasting mutual understanding with Christianity's and Judaism's nearest neighbour Islam.

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Pastor Friedhelm Pieper, General Secretary