



The International Council of Christians and Jews writes to Cardinal Kasper regarding recent controversies

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Deeply concerned by the public controversies and recriminations relating to the international Catholic-Jewish Historians Commission's decision to halt its research into the role of the Holy See during World War II, ICCJ General Secretary, Rev. Friedhelm Pieper on behalf of the Council's Executive Board on 29 August 2001 wrote to Cardinal Kasper

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Heppenheim - Deeply concerned by the public controversies and recriminations relating to the international Catholic-Jewish Historians Commission's decision to halt its research into the role of the Holy See during World War II, ICCJ General Secretary, Rev. Friedhelm Pieper on behalf of the Council's Executive Board on 29 August 2001 wrote to Cardinal Kasper, President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Expressing appreciation of the Cardinal's communiqué of 24 August, that 'the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews will do its best, in the following months together with Jewish partners, to find adequate means to reopen the research on new grounds' and recalling his appeal for an intensification of the Christian-Jewish dialogue and its ongoing need to discover its very existential and religious depth in his keynote address at the ICCJ's July conference in Montevideo, the letter states that any effort to reconstitute the Commission would find the ICCJ's sincere support.

Commenting on the controversies the letter continues: '... as far as we can see there have been some flaws in the way the historians' work was carried out, and there apparently had been different expectations which in the end were irreconcilable. This unfortunately led to the public controversy among the group members, regarding the interpretation of the commission's decision to call a halt and especially with regard to Mr Seymour Reich's press statement of 23 July, issued without prior internal consultation.' In addition the letter of the ICCJ also emphasises how much the Council and its international membership has been '... disturbed by Fr. Gumpel's reply of 26 July, (published by the Vatican Press Office on August 17) singling out the Jewish members of the group and imputing their 'campaign' and a 'violent attack' against the Catholic Church. We are most concerned about the language of imputation which comes near to echoing overtones of classical antisemitism. We regret this approach which does not mirror the language of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church nor in particular that of the statement We Remember. We fear that the tone of Fr Gumpel's remarks risks undermining the Vatican's credibility and furthermore, that it will render more difficult your Commission's work in the furtherance of Christian-Jewish understanding. It also may give a negative message and endanger any constructive resolution of the tension surrounding the historians' project.'

Rev. Pieper states that the aim of the letter was to request urgently 'to seek all possible ways to help overcome this current crisis'. At the same time the ICCJ emphasises the Council's belief 'that while the historians' project is of course important, recognition must be given to the many other fruitful avenues of dialogue.' In conclusion the letter expresses the hope that the Vatican and its

responsible Jewish dialogue partners will not allow this present controversy to harm the process of intensifying the renewal in Catholic-Jewish relations and trust for which the Cardinal so movingly called in Montevideo.