



Communiqué - Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

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Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity: Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, comments on the controversy about the work of the International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission, which was charged with studying the role of the Vatican during the Second World War, especially as concerns the Holocaust.

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Relations between the Catholic Church and Judaism registered a positive turning point with the publication of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (n. 4). Dialogue replaced old discussions.

In this new climate, in October 1999, the *Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations* appointed a group of experts, made up of three Jewish representatives and three Catholic representatives, with the task of examining and formulating questions relating to the 11 volumes of *"Actes et Documents du Saint-Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale"* previously compiled by well known historians and published between 1965 and 1981. As a matter of fact, up to that date, the rich documentation contained in these volumes had only marginally been taken into account in the public debate concerning the Holy See and the Holocaust.

In July 2001, the *Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews* learnt with regret of the team of scholars' decision to suspend the research. At the same time, the *Commission* is grateful to the members of the group, especially to the Catholic ones, for their availability and for what has been achieved.

From the beginning of the team's work it was apparent that, within the framework of the task entrusted to the group, questions would emerge which could not be completely answered without further study, including consultation of sources that are not yet accessible. Nevertheless, it was felt that the outcome of the research could have appropriately encouraged an objective dialogue.

The team of historians had accepted to assume their task, which was not easy. It had not been promised, at any stage in the process, that they could access documents of the Vatican's Secret

Archive after 1922.

In October 2000 the panel of experts issued a [Preliminary Report](#), posing 47 questions; this document was the object of controversial discussions among other scholars. The continuation of the research by the group of historians was widely examined in the course of the meeting of the *International Liaison Committee* in New York (1-4 May 2001). After this constructive discussion, both parties expressed willingness to continue the research in view of the publication of a *Final Report*.

Unfortunately, different interpretations of the tasks and aim of the group remained unresolved. In addition, indiscretion and polemical remarks in the press from the Jewish side contributed to awakening sentiments of distrust. All of this has made it impossible to continue the research together at present.

Academic investigations can only be carried out on the basis of fairness, respect and mutual trust among those who jointly undertake it. This indispensable prerequisite was lost when polemical statements circulated and accusatory suspicions were voiced regarding the suspension of the research work. The Catholic members of the group publicly disagreed with these polemical interpretations and evaluations. At present and within such a climate, it does not seem possible to continue the common work.

The *Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews* wishes to remove any doubt on the irreversibility of the dialogue started between the Jews and the Catholics, a journey that should continue with mutual respect and trust. Such a process, launched by the Second Vatican Council, has advanced greatly under Pope John Paul II's leadership. Influential Jewish representatives made known that they do not wish open polemics, re-stating their will to continue and deepen our dialogue on religious matters.

The fostering of ongoing relationships between Jews and Catholics will require historical investigations. Access to all relevant historical sources constitutes a natural demand of such investigations. The wish of many historians to have access to the archives relating to the Pontificates of Pius XI (1922-1939) and Pius XII (1939-1958) is understandable and legitimate. Out of respect for the truth, the Holy See is ready to consent to the access of the Vatican's Secret Archive as soon as the reorganising and the cataloguing work is concluded.

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, in the hope that it might be possible to reach a common clarification on the questions raised - all this according to the firm belief of the *Commission* that the Catholic Church is not afraid of the historical truth.

Walter Cardinal Kasper

President

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