# Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past

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**The study of the topic "The Church and the Faults of the Past" was proposed to the International Theological Commission by its President, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in view of the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000.**

## INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION

## MEMORY AND RECONCILIATION:

THE CHURCH AND THE FAULTS OF THE PAST

*December 1999*

**PRELIMINARY NOTE**

The study of the topic "The Church and the Faults of the Past" was proposed to the International Theological Commission by its President, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in view of the celebration of the Jubilee Year 2000. A sub-commission was established to prepare this study; it was composed of Rev. Christopher BEGG, Msgr. Bruno FORTE (President), Rev. Sebastian KAROTEMPREL, S.D.B., Msgr. Roland MINNERATH, Rev. Thomas NORRIS, Rev. Rafael SALAZAR CARDENAS, M.Sp.S., and Msgr. Anton STRUKELJ. The general discussion of this theme took place in numerous meetings of the sub-commission and during the plenary sessions of the International Theological Commission held in Rome from 1998 to 1999. By written vote, the present text was approved in *forma specifica* by the Commission, and was then submitted to the President, Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who gave his approval for its publication.

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The relationship between Christians and Jews is one of the areas requiring a special examination of conscience.(81) "The Church's relationship to the Jewish people is unlike the one she shares with any other religion."(82) Nevertheless, "the history of the relations between Jews and Christians is a tormented one... In effect, the balance of these relations over two thousand years has been quite negative."(83) The hostility or diffidence of numerous Christians toward Jews in the course of time is a sad historical fact and is the cause of profound remorse for Christians aware of the fact that "Jesus was a descendent of David; that the Virgin Mary and the Apostles belonged to the Jewish people; that the Church draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (cf. *Rom* 11:17-24); that the Jews are our dearly beloved brothers, indeed in a certain sense they are 'our elder brothers.'"(84)

The Shoah was certainly the result of the pagan ideology that was Nazism, a pagan ideology animated by a merciless anti-Semitism that not only despised the faith of the Jewish people, but also denied their very human dignity. Nevertheless, "it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts... Did Christians give every possible assistance to those being persecuted, and in particular to the persecuted Jews?"(85) There is no doubt that there were many Christians who risked their lives to save and to help their Jewish neighbors. It seems, however, also true that "alongside such courageous men and women, the spiritual resistance and concrete action of other Christians was not that which might have been expected from Christ's followers."(86) This fact constitutes a call to the consciences of all Christians today, so as to require "an act of repentance (*teshuva*),"(87) and to be a stimulus to increase efforts to be "transformed by renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:2), as well as to keep a "moral and religious memory" of the injury inflicted on the Jews. In this area, much has already been done, but this should be confirmed and deepened.

The full text of the statement is available on the Web site of the Vatican

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