



## Supported by One Root. Our Relationship to Judaism

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Our Relationship to Judaism

#### Statement by the Catholic Bishops

in The Netherlands, 1995

For Christians, the Jewish religion has an essential and permanent meaning. This fundamental insight was formally articulated thirty years ago, on October 28, 1965, by the Second Vatican Council in the declaration [\*Nostra Aetate\*](#). It showed that the Church cannot understand itself correctly when it ignores its relationship to Judaism.

*Nostra Aetate* stimulated a continuous development in the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and Judaism. One of the ways in which this is expressed is in the Holy Sees official recognition of the State of Israel and the establishment of reciprocal diplomatic relations. On that occasion the Roman Catholic Church expressly defined the obligation to combat every form of antisemitism.

Consistent with this development is the honest reflection on their own history that recently led the Polish and German bishops to recognize co-responsibility for the persecution of the Jews in the past. In all sincerity we join them in this sentiment.

#### **SHOAH**

In the same way that we are filled with gratitude this year when we recall the end of the War,<sup>\*</sup> we are also filled with shame and dismay when we recall the Shoah. Literally, this Hebrew word means “catastrophe.” It has come to refer to the murder perpetrated on the Jewish people in those parts of Europe occupied by Germany in the years 1933 to 1945. From our country the second highest percentage of Jews was deported and murdered. This thought holds us in its grasp.

Looking back on the attitude of Dutch Catholics during the war, our thoughts turn to the

courageous actions of the episcopacy then led by Archbishop J. de Jong. The occupiers punished this action by deporting and murdering Catholics of Jewish origin, among whom the Blessed Edith Stein. Others also witnessed in their resistance against the persecution of the Jews to authentic humanity and Christian faith.

## **ERRORS**

But could Catholics not have done more? Were they not required to do more? These questions are too general to answer. The history of the twenty-century-long relationship between Jews and Christians is very complex and has left many traces of its passing. There is no doubt that church institutions have made errors.

A tradition of theological and ecclesiastical anti-Judaism contributed to the climate that made the Shoah possible. What was known as the “catechesis of vilification” taught that Jewry after Christ's death was rejected as a people.

Partly due to these traditions, Catholics in our country sometimes were reserved toward Jews, and sometimes indifferent or ill-disposed. Just after the war this was still apparent on the return of those who had been hidden from or who had survived the concentration camps.

We reject this tradition of ecclesiastical anti-Judaism and deeply regret its horrible results. With our pope and other episcopal conferences, we condemn every form of antisemitism as a sin against God and humanity.

## **CHANGE OF ATTITUDE**

In the thirty years since [\*Nostra Aetate\*](#), our Church has undergone a fortuitous change of attitude. A dialogue has been initiated between representatives of Judaism and Christianity. In it Christians become more familiar with how Judaism sees itself, in its tradition and in its present situation, while Jews better understand who Jesus Christ is for us Christians. We rejoice in the results of this approach. But there is still much to do. Prejudice and forms of antisemitism arise repeatedly in our society. This demands vigilance and decisiveness. Our Church has thus taken several initiatives.

In 1951 the Katholieke Raad voor Israel (Catholic Council for Israel) was established with the purpose of increasing awareness in our Church of the meaning of Judaism and improving our relationship. Last year we gave this council official status as an independent church institution.

In addition we inaugurated last year an episcopal commission for relations with Judaism which is intended to support the policy of the bishops conference in this area. We appreciate the increased attention devoted to Judaism in Catholic theological education — not only in its historical meaning but also in its present form and the meaning it has now for the Christian tradition.

The dialogue between Christian churches and Judaism has received a fixed form in The Netherlands in the Overlegorgaan van Joden en Christenen (Consultative Organization for Jews and Christians, OJEC). Via the Katholieke Raad voor Israel (Catholic Council for Israel), our Church participates in this organization.

## **VITALLY LINKED**

Neither condemnation nor vilification, but respect and humility must determine our attitude to Judaism's role in God's history among people.

We Christians may never forget that Jesus of Nazareth is a son of the Jewish people, rooted in the tradition of Moses and the prophets. In meeting Judaism, we will better understand Jesus. In the

scriptures, but also in our theology and liturgy, we remain vitally linked with the Jewish religion. Jews and Christians are sustained by the same root.

The more our actions are grounded in that awareness, the more we will contribute to the shalom promised to all peoples. We appeal to everyone to adopt the words Paul addressed to the Christians of Rome: "If the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place and have come to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. If you do boast, consider that you do not support the root; the root supports you" (Rom 11: 16-18).

**Note**

\*) See *Liberated! Message from the Dutch Bishops on the Occasion of the 50 Years of Liberation* (May 1995) and *Message from the Dutch Bishops on the Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Independence of Indonesia* (July 1995).

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