

If I understand my mandate correctly, the title I have been asked to address concerns less the theological dimensions of the bilateral relationship and more the issues as well as the mechanisms that have emerged for Jewish and Israeli relations with the Holy See over the course of the last almost half century.

However, allow me the immodesty of mentioning, for those of you who may be interested, that I have in the past, tentatively addressed the question of the theological nature of the bilateral relationship and proposed a theology of complementarity. My latest reference to such was in my presentation on a panel, also with His Eminence Cardinal Koch, at the Community of Sant Egidio's annual Meeting of Religions and Peoples convened this year in Munich. This annual conference pursues and is inspired by the vision of the Assisi gathering first convened by Blessed Pope John Paul II; and coincidentally I will be going from here to join with Cardinal Koch and others at the twenty fifth anniversary gathering being convened in Assisi by Pope Benedict XVI, affirming his own commitment to this ongoing vision. Allow me also to mention that I have written on Pope Benedict XVI's own approach towards Jewry and Judaism, perhaps most notably in an article for the Knights of Columbus's publication on the occasion of his visit to the USA.

However, we must not forget that all this is part of a stunning revolution and transformation in relations between Christians and Jews, and in particular on the part of the Catholic Church.

Aside from the all pervasive "teaching of contempt" as Jules Isaac termed it, which had prevailed until the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council; prior to the pontificate of Blessed Pope John XXIII, the Vatican had actually opposed the involvement of Catholics in any official dialogue with Jewry. This is well documented in the case of the pioneering British Council of Christians and Jews in which Catholics were officially discouraged from participation prior to Vatican II.

Moreover we should bear in mind the ongoing reservation if not hostility of the Holy See towards the very idea of Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land, even for years after the establishment of the Jewish State.

The semi-official Vatican publication of the Jesuits, *Civiltà Cattolica* and also *Osservatore Romano* itself, continued to express such sentiments well into the nineteen fifties. Such an example was the article entitled "The dangerous influence of Zionism" by G.de Vries published in *Civiltà Cattolica* in April 1950 that described the newly established State of Israel as "racist" and "fanatic" and "infected by the worst kind of materialism..... substantially due to Soviet influence".

The apparent Jesuit expert on the subject of the State of Israel for *Civiltà Cattolica* was Father A. Messineo, who continued to write articles well into the fifties declaring that Pius X, Benedict XV, Pius XI and Pius XII, all opposed the idea of Zionism both because of its secularity and because of the impiety of the very idea of Jews being in control of Christian holy sites.

But the main problem, he wrote, was "not just the holy places, but the salvation of so many souls dear to the heart of Christ who were "endangered" by the Jewish conquest of the Holy Land"!

All this only heightens the degree of the transformation that came about in the pontificate of Blessed John XXIII, with the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*; and the subsequent documents and statements of the Magisterium on Catholic-Jewish relations.

There had accordingly been significant contacts between the Vatican and Jewish representatives, in advance of and during the course of the Second Vatican Council; and especially in preparation for the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* in 1965.

However in 1970 the Office for Catholic-Jewish relations in the Secretariat for Christian Unity set up by Cardinal Augustin Bea at the initiative of Pope John XXIII – to be succeeded in 1974 by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews presided over by Cardinal Johannes Willebrands – sought a representative Jewish body as an official interlocutor that would unify the different Jewish bodies claiming to represent the Jewish People to the Church and would legitimately represent the diversity of contemporary Jewry. This led to the formation of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) initially made up of the major Jewish international and American organizations functioning in this field. The latter included the only specific religious body, the Synagogue Council of America, embracing the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements in the U.S.A. While the SCA subsequently collapsed, the three movements remained in IJCIC through both their respective lay and rabbinic organizations.

The initial meeting of the CRRJ and IJCIC led to the formation of the International Catholic Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) which until 2002 remained the only official Jewish partner of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry (CRRJ).

This meeting produced a historic memorandum of understanding which identified a major concern for the ILC to be that of combating anti-Semitism through eliminating from educational materials and liturgy anything offensive and incompatible with the teachings of *Nostra Aetate*; and it committed the parties to promoting mutual understanding, in particular through education, inter alia, giving special attention to the ways in which the relationship between religious community, people and land, are conceived in the Jewish and Christian traditions respectively.

The ILC was also to focus on "ways in which Judaism and Christianity, as communities deriving from the biblical faith in one God as Creator, concerned with the fate of this world, can face together the problems besetting religion in the modern age."

The memorandum suggested that "at a later stage studies might be undertaken of the common heritage of Jews and Christians in order to further the understanding both of each other and of their common responsibility to humanity and the world."

The ILC met annually until 1985, but since 1990 has held meetings every two years.

Some of the goals of the memorandum of understanding were initially pursued vigorously.

Despite the fact that the memorandum did not mention the State of Israel as such, the undertaking to explore "the ways in which the relationship between religious community and land are conceived" in the respective traditions, was the focus of the first substantive ILC thematic discussions that took place in the first years. These set the stage for the repeated and ongoing call from IJCIC to the Holy See through the ILC, for official recognition of the State of Israel and for the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations.

While combating Anti-Semitism was a constant theme, it took a while before the ILC formally addressed the subject, which it did quite dramatically in 1990 in Prague. The comments of Cardinal Willebrand's successor, Cardinal Edward Cassidy, that the fact "that Anti-Semitism has found a place in Christian thought and practice calls for an act of teshuvah (repentance) and of reconciliation on our part....." was not only contained in the concluding statement of the 13<sup>th</sup> ILC, but was also repeated by Pope John Paul II when he received ILC delegates later that year in Rome for a special celebratory meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Nostra Aetate. The subject of Anti-Semitism was further pursued four years later at the meeting in Jerusalem; and naturally it featured prominently as well at the 1998 ILC in Rome which took place a week after the promulgation of "We Remember – A reflection on the Shoah".

In addition to focusing on the educational challenges, subjects that flowed from a shared ethical heritage and moral responsibility were addressed over the years including religious freedom; the challenges of secularism; the sanctity of life; human rights; youth and faith. The ILC also discussed and issued joint documents on the environment, the family, holy sites and education. However to be frank, these important declarations were never widely, let alone systematically, disseminated. I dare to say that the challenge in this regard remains on the table.

A new stage developed with the turn of the millennium in which ethical themes were not only addressed conceptually, but also were taken to a new dimension of joint cooperation.

At the 2004 Buenos Aires meeting on Tzedek and Tzedakah, and at the Cape Town meeting on Dignifying the Divine Image – focusing on healthcare and the challenge of HIV/AIDS; Jewish and Catholic philanthropy and social services were brought together to become greater than the sum of their different parts and to cooperate in addressing the financial crisis in Latin America in the former; and at the latter, the challenges arising from the AIDS pandemic.

A critical dimension of the Jewish-Christian relationship, not specifically addressed in the memorandum of understanding, but courageously confronted at the 1977 ILC, was the subject of Mission and Witness – i.e. whether the Church should seek to proselytize among Jews.

The late Dr. Geoffrey Wigoder, a past- chairman of IJCIC noted that the remarkable presentation of Professor Tommaso Fredericci had been endorsed by Cardinal Willebrands.

However Fredericci's bottom line that the logical conclusion of *Nostra Aetate* must be to reject any attempt to call on Jews to accept the Christian faith, as they were already in a covenantal relationship with God – a position subsequently reiterated by the third President of the Holy See's CRRJ, Cardinal Walter Kasper – was omitted from the official Vatican publication of Fredericci's text.

As we know, this question of the exact meaning of *Nostra Aetate* for Christology let alone for an understanding of the nature of the Divine Covenant with the Jewish People itself, remains a key debate within the Church with naturally profound bearing on the bilateral relationship and it was at the heart of the crisis with the Vatican a few years ago concerning the prayer for the Jews in the Tridentine Latin liturgy for the Triduum.

This was but one example of the fact that notwithstanding the remarkable transformation in Catholic-Jewish relations ushered in by *Nostra Aetate*, and even after the establishment of the ILC, there have been recurrent controversies and challenges for Jewish-Vatican relations. While these have also related to the aforementioned question of the precise theological import of *Nostra Aetate*, most of these have unsurprisingly related directly or indirectly to the Shoah and the Second World War period.

I will not review all of them, but since the institutionalization of the bilateral relationship, there were two particularly difficult periods – in the late 1980's and the late 1990's.

Arguably the principle source of tension in the late eighties stemmed from the establishment of the Carmelite convent in Auschwitz and the reactions to it. This was compounded by the papal reception of Kurt Waldheim. The consequences of these tensions were both a hiatus in the meetings of the ILC, but also the positive Papal commitment to produce a document on the Church and the Shoah.

The eventual papal intervention in the Carmelite convent controversy leading to the latter's relocation, brought eventual closure to the episode; and the ILC sought to overcome the negative fallout and misunderstandings by initiating the first ever joint travel mission in 1991, specifically to central/eastern Europe - to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, to meet with the leadership of both Catholic and Jewish Communities.

This mission was not simply born out of the desire to repair damaged bridges, but far more out of a recognition – highlighted by the Carmelite convent affair – of the widespread ignorance in Central and Eastern Europe (intensified under Communist rule) of the achievements in Catholic-Jewish relations and reconciliation over the preceding decades.

The second hiatus in the late nineties was attributed by Cardinal Cassidy, the then-president of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews – to what he described as "a bitter campaign of serious accusations against Pius XII" that he identified as coming from the World Jewish Congress influencing IJCIC's approach which he described as "aggressive".

The canonization of Edith Stein in 1998 further intensified the crisis, which was compounded by a rather atypically insensitive comment on the part of Pope John Paul II expressing the hope that Stein would accordingly serve as a symbol for Jewish-Christian reconciliation. These words revealed that despite his historic contribution to the advances and flourishing in Christian-Jewish relations, John Paul II still had not fathomed the fullness of Jewish self-understanding and integrity that the 1974 Guidelines on *Nostra Aetate* urge Catholics to understand.

The Vatican's unwillingness to cooperate with a body that it saw as confrontational, had an inevitable impact; and in late 1998 Cardinal Cassidy reported that the bilateral relationship with IJCIC terminated.

However in November 2000 a way was sought to overcome the impasse through the establishment of an International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission to review the historical record of the Holy See during the period of the Shoah. This promising initiative which started well, ended in dissent and acrimony, with accusations and counter accusations. It became evident that there had been expectations that in the end could not be delivered. While these focused on the technicalities of access to the Vatican secret archives, they probably reflected the unbridgeable differences with regards to perceptions pertaining to the period and to the key protagonists.

Of course the essence of this controversy remains and retains its combustibility for the bilateral relationship, and naturally it causes distress on both sides, as evidenced in the Vatican's reaction to Yad VaShem's treatment of Pius XII's record during World War II. While Jewish organizations continue to call for open scholarly access to the Holy See's secret archives from the Shoah period; reassurances have recently been received from Rome that this will be made available in some five or six years time.

Nevertheless, it seems clear to me that this issue will remain one in which different and even conflicting perspectives are maintained on each side, and probably the best we will be able to achieve is to respectfully agree to disagree.

In the meantime, in the early nineties, other dramatic developments in Catholic-Jewish relations occurred that established a new official line of communication and ultimately led to the creation of an additional official Catholic-Jewish Commission under the Vatican's auspices..

The absence of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel had, as already indicated, been a source of concern in the bilateral relationship between Jewry and the Catholic Church. Many if not most within the Jewish community – and I dare say not a few Catholics – viewed this absence as an indication that the Holy See still had theological problems with the idea of a Jewish sovereign state in the Holy Land and above all in Jerusalem (as reflected in the abovementioned articles in *Civiltà Cattolica* in particular) despite the fact that in the eighties the Vatican explicitly denied this to be the case.

However negotiations between the Holy See and the State of Israel, following the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, and the eventual signing of the Fundamental Agreement between the two at the end of 1993 leading to full bilateral relations, resolved this matter and eliminated any need for IJCIC to continue its previous role as advocate for the State of Israel which the latter could now fully do for itself.

Moreover the Fundamental Agreement also included a joint commitment of the Holy See and the State of Israel to work together to combat Anti-Semitism and other forms of racism and intolerance, as well as to promote mutual understanding among nations, respect for human life and dignity, and to promote peace conflict resolution.

Thus the Holy See declared the State of Israel itself to be a partner in the pursuit of moral and ethical goals and not just diplomatic ones !

Above all, with the historic visit of Pope John Paul II to Israel as part of his pilgrimage in the year 2000 – a visit substantially facilitated by the establishment of full bilateral relations – a formal interreligious dialogue was initiated with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel which was also conducted by the Vatican under the auspices of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

As the official state body representing the Jewish faith, the Chief Rabbinate (for all its many limitations) provided a new kind of official partner for the Holy See's CRRJ. There is much symbolic significance to this bilateral commission, and it has also served to pave the way for greater international Jewish Orthodox engagement with the Catholic Church.

Meeting annually alternately in Rome and Jerusalem, the focus of deliberations has been on subjects with contemporary social, scientific and ethical significance, from the respective religious perspectives.. The summaries/ statements from these meetings were published by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation on the occasion of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Israel in 2009.

However beyond the subject material and the warm friendships established between the members of the bilateral commission, it is clear that it is accorded great significance by the Holy See for what it represents. This was reflected in Pope Benedict XVI's speeches during his papal pilgrimage to Israel in 2009 and on his visit to the Rome synagogue the following year.

Moreover this bilateral commission has also proved to be a most valuable channel for communication and advocacy as was evidenced in particular in the clarifications received both concerning the Latin Mass referred to before and the brief crisis in relations with the Vatican over the affair with Bishop Williamson and the Society of St. Pius X.

To be specific, the fact that the relationship with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel is a relationship with a state organ – and also functions from the Vatican side under the purview of the Papal Nuncio – provides more direct access to the Secretariat of State which IJCIC and other Jewish bodies do not have in the same way. Accordingly the Chief Rabbinate served as the most immediate and primary channel for the abovementioned clarifications

Notwithstanding the establishment of full relations between the State of Israel and the Holy See, this relationship has not been without its difficulties. These have stemmed overwhelmingly from Israel's failure to fulfill the expectations of the Holy See that the latter had assumed had been achieved by the Fundamental Agreement and the commitments given by Israel to resolve the outstanding issues within two years (specifically, legal and fiscal matters).

I will not now go into detail regarding the reasons for Israel's failure to deliver fully on those expectations. Suffice it to say here that there were those in the Israeli civil service who felt that the interpretation of the relevant clauses needed to be tightened up in order to protect Israel's interests. The result has been that while a subsequent legal agreement was reached, it was not ratified; and the fiscal negotiations have dragged on for over fifteen years.

Remarkably there was only faint agitation on the part of the Holy See, that no doubt reinforced the will of the revisionists on the Israeli side. I have been on public record as saying that I do not believe that any country that had entered into a treaty and then discovered that the assumptions on which it signed the treaty are not shared let alone honored by the other party, would have tolerated such a situation. Arguably the restraint shown by the Holy See is a tribute to its sensitivity regarding relations with the Jewish State.

Recent controversies which have already been referred to, namely the Triduum prayer for the Jews in the more widely permitted use again of the Tridentine Latin liturgy; and the lifting of the excommunication of the Society of Saint Pius X ( including Bishop Williamson), have highlighted what arguably appear to be the main challenges in relations with the Vatican, beyond any remaining theological tensions.

To some extent and maybe even to a large extent these may be inherent in the structure or at least the modus operandi of the Vatican, but their ramifications are more substantive.

To begin with, these problems have exposed a wider issue; namely, the lack of prior consultation that could avoid misunderstanding and the need for all the post factum crisis management.

If there are official channels for bilateral dialogue; and if there is a genuine desire for mutual trust and confidence; then is it too much to expect that these channels be used to provide for advance consultation or at least prior notice of intentions that have bearing on the bilateral relationship? Indeed, the failure to do so to some extent gives the whole institutional dialogue an image of impotency and some would even say irrelevancy in practical terms.

Moreover these tensions add to the degree of confusion as to what indeed are the practical implications that are drawn from *Nostra Aetate*.

In fact in recent years certain Catholic theologians have argued that *Nostra Aetate* is not a binding magisterial document. A few years ago, the news service ZENIT published an interview with one such theologian who claimed that *Nostra Aetate* has no doctrinal authority and that to attribute such to it would be "greatly ingenuous" and an "historical error".

In addition there have been those that have argued that the permanent Covenant referred to in *Nostra Aetate* on the basis of Paul, refers to the Covenant with Abraham and not the Covenant with Moses, thus arguing against any idea of salvific legitimacy for contemporary Judaism. Indeed the late Cardinal Avery Dulles declared that it is "an open question whether the Old Covenant remains in force today."

These comments would appear to be in clear variance with the frequent explicit words of blessed Pope John Paul II, as well as at variance with the two documents issued by the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews: the Guidelines on *Nostra Aetate* of 1974; and the 1985 Notes On The Correct Way To Present Jews And Judaism In Preaching And Teaching.

The revised text that Pope Benedict XVI wrote for the prayer for the Jews in the Triduum Latin Liturgy that Jews (and others) saw as still very problematic; as well as the lifting of the excommunication of the SSPX and the apparent willingness to compromise with the latter, reinforced the perception that the aforementioned Catholic reinterpretations limiting the meaning and significance of *Nostra Aetate* had support at the highest level.

However Pope Benedict XVI's clarifications, and especially his address in the synagogue in Rome referring to the Covenant of Moses (as had Pope John Paul II already in 1980 in Mainz and on many subsequent occasions) did substantially set the record straight and counterbalanced this revisionism to a significant degree. Nevertheless, the Jewish community (as well of course as many Catholics) continues to watch the ongoing negotiations with SSPX with concern.

No less problematic is the fact that we rarely hear references by Church authorities to those aforementioned documents, the Guidelines and the Notes; and we hardly hear clear repudiation from the Holy See when such aforementioned theological revisionism is expressed.

Furthermore, lingering concerns about the degree to which *Nostra Aetate* and those subsequent documents are embraced by the Church, are nurtured by the fact that not only are they rarely a required part of the syllabus for the formation of clergy; but that in many parts of the Catholic world they are hardly known at all.

In the Middle East, this ignorance fuels political hostility and anti-Semitism itself and at the special Synod on the Middle East held last year in the Vatican, this ignorance was evident – perhaps most dramatically in the statements at a press conference of Greek Catholic Bishop Cyril Bustros, who at the time was head of his church in the US.

But as deplorable as his pre-conciliar comments were, there was no official repudiation of them, only a muted reaffirmation of the official Vatican position by its spokesman.

Bustros' lamentable ignorance of the official teachings of the Magisterium, let alone his words contradicting them, certainly did not appear to have any constraining impact on his elevation to become Melkite Metropolitan of Beirut a few months later. But this should come as little surprise in the wake of the statements of the Melkite Patriarch Gregorius III who has described both terrorist attacks on Iraqi Christians as well as the uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad as emanating from "a Zionist conspiracy against Islam" !

Such statements are not especially surprising, but the failure of the Holy See to publicly censure them, is very lamentable, even if there are understandable political reasons for such extreme discretion.

Blessed John Paul II declared in his momentous address at the synagogue in Rome in 1986 that all that is required of Catholics in terms of relations with Jews and Judaism is to study *Nostra Aetate* and the documents issued for its implementation carefully, "immersing oneself in their teachings and putting them into practice."

It seems to me that there is still a way to go for his call to be fully embraced.

Let me not leave anyone under the impression that I think the responsibilities lie only on one side, God forbid. The Jewish community itself still has a long way to go in overcoming its own prejudices and reservations in relation to the Christian world - especially outside the United States, as in the latter the situation is generally far more healthy.

However, our relationship is not symmetrical; the history of our relationship is asymmetrical; and thus the onus for transformation is accordingly asymmetrical as well.

Cardinal Walter Kasper stated that "we are only at the beginning and still far from a definitive understanding ... of the overall Christian theology of Judaism."

In addition, the then Cardinal Ratzinger in a private conversation with me more than twenty years ago stated that "we have not yet fully understood the meaning of Nostra Aetate's affirmation of the eternal nature of the Covenant with the Jewish people."

Obviously further theological reflection on the part of the Church to explore the meaning and import of that affirmation in Nostra Aetate, is not a simple matter for Catholic Christology and ecclesiology.

However without that further clarification there remains confusion within the Jewish community (and I might say within the Catholic world as well) as to how Catholicism truly views Jewry both in soteriological and contemporary terms.

That confusion leads to misunderstanding and inevitable tensions, which may well be unavoidable.

However if indeed this is the case, then all the more reason that we should at the very least make sure that the mechanisms for necessary crisis management are both in place and effective. There appears to be work to be done in this regard.

Above all, if the Vatican desires to reassure the confidence of its interreligious partners generally, but of the Jewish community in particular; then there needs to be a far more robust approach to absorbing the messages of Nostra Aetate, the documents of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry, and Blessed John Paul II's texts on the subject of Catholic-Jewish relations, into the educational fabric and syllabi of the Church worldwide.

Notwithstanding these ongoing challenges for the bilateral relationship, we must never take for granted the truly amazing transformation in Catholic-Jewish relations that has taken place in this last half century.

A community that had been seen as even cursed and rejected by God and as the enemy of the Church, is now seen in the words of Blessed John Paul II as "the dearly beloved elder brother of the Church, of the ancient Covenant never revoked and never to be revoked". For this we must truly give thanks to our Father in Heaven.