

Rabbi David Rosen

Your Holiness,

It was the privilege of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, as the official Jewish partner of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, to be received by you here very shortly after the commencement of your Pontificate. This second occasion comes on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of our joint International Jewish-Catholic Liaison Committee – itself the fruit of *Nostra Aetate* – due to be held in Budapest in ten days time.

The two central themes of the forthcoming 20<sup>th</sup> ILC may be viewed as reflecting the key character and purpose of our relationship.

The first is that of the role of religion in secular society. This reflects our continuous desire as Jews and Catholics to confront the challenges of our time and to draw on our respective traditions – above all upon the values within them that we share, to provide guidance and benefit for society at large.

The second theme of our 20<sup>th</sup> ILC meeting is the state of Catholic-Jewish relations in Eastern Europe in particular; and reflects our commitment to combating the tragic blights of the past that have afflicted our relationship – specifically anti-Semitism, which the late Pope John Paul II described as "a sin against God and man". Renascent nationalism is all too often associated with xenophobia and anti-Semitism which regrettably has demonstrated itself to be a powerfully resistant evil virus, not least of all in those societies where this prejudice has been rife for millennia.

We are profoundly grateful for all that the Holy See has said and done in recent times to help combat this sin and all forms of bigotry and prejudice.

Our Budapest meeting will open with a commemoration of Kristallnacht, the event which, as it were, heralded the darkest period in Jewish history and which in its own way reflected the tragedy of our past relationship. For even if, as Your Holiness most importantly declared in Birkenau and recently reiterated in Paris, Nazism was in fact an assault on the roots of the Church itself, nevertheless the fact that the tragedy could take place with the ease that it did, perpetrated by so many who

were baptized Christians, is a reflection of the degree to which anti-Semitism had insinuated itself into these societies.

However we give thanks for those Christians who were true to the most sublime of the teachings of their faith and saved many Jews during that terrible time. In this regard we reiterate our respectful call for full and transparent access of scholars to all archival material from that period, so that assessments regarding actions and policies during this tragic period may have the credibility they deserve both within our respective communities and beyond.

The fact that in Hungary, where half of the Jewish community was exterminated, Kristallnacht will be commemorated together with the Catholic Church led by His Eminence Cardinal Erdo, who has been publicly recognized by the Jewish community for his work "to preserve the memory of the Jews killed during the Holocaust and those who saved Jews", is itself a reflection of how far we have come in transforming the tragedy of the past into a memorial for the future to advance our friendship and cooperation.

For this we give thanks for Your Holiness' own contribution, following in the footsteps of the historic actions and declarations made by the late Pope John Paul II.

At a Papal audience for the ILC in 1990 celebrating the twenty fifth anniversary of Nostra Aetate, Pope John Paul II emphasized in accordance with that historic document, that "the Church's very nature is intrinsically linked with her reflection ....on the nature of the Jewish People." He then mentioned the challenge for the Church to further "reflect upon and express more thoroughly her thinking on the 'mystery' which is the Jewish people" as "an intimate part of the 'mystery' of revelation and salvation."

During the last year and a half there has been some concern within the Jewish community that the commitment to this charge might be weakening and there were interpretations in the wake of Your Holiness' Motu Proprio and reformulation of the Latin rite prayer in the Easter liturgy for the Conversion of the Jews, that portrayed these as a regression in terms of our relationship of mutual respect.

We were accordingly most grateful for the clarifications we received from His Eminence Cardinal Kasper – reiterated by His Eminence Cardinal Bertone in his letter to the Chief Rabbis of Israel – affirming that this prayer is eschatological in nature and in no way reflects any endorsement of proselytization of Jews on the part of the Church.

We are furthermore greatly heartened by the fact that the Synod of Bishops meeting, just concluded here in Rome, made a point of emphasizing the importance not only of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves for the Church, but also of the place of the people of these Scriptures, the people of Israel, in this regard. Moreover the fact that the Synod was addressed for the first time ever by a rabbi – one of the leading rabbis of Israel – is itself surely a remarkable testimony.

Above all we profoundly appreciate the words of your Holiness at your meeting last month with our co-religionists in France – a meeting which like those held by your Holiness on your visit to the USA, reflected the special regard of the Holy See for the Jewish community. In Paris you emphasized "the eternal Covenant of the Almighty" with the Jewish people, whom the Church sees "as her beloved brothers in Faith". We pray that your emphasis on the eternal validity of the Sinai Covenant will stimulate the charge of your blessed predecessor, to "further reflect upon and express more thoroughly" the meaning of the Church's relationship with the Jewish People; thereby enabling us to continue to grow in mutual respect for one another's integrity.

Before concluding my words, Your Holiness, I wish to express the solidarity of the Jewish community represented by IJCIC, with our Christian brothers and sisters who have been and are suffering from violence and persecution in different parts of the world - especially in Iraq, in India and in Southeast Asia. We pray for their well being and that the achievements of our own relationship will inspire others to overcome the wounds of the past and live together in the spirit of mutual respect and cooperation.