

THE BILATERAL COMMISSION MEETING OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE'S COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

20.01.2010

STATEMENT OF THE BILATERAL COMMISSION MEETING OF THE DELEGATION OF THE HOLY SEE'S COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS AND THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ISRAEL'S DELEGATION FOR RELATIONS WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH (ROME, JANUARY 17-20, 2010; SHVAT, 2-5, 5790)

The Bilateral Commission of the Holy See and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel held its ninth meeting pursuant to their participation in the historic visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Great Synagogue in Rome. At this event the Pope categorically reaffirmed the commitment of the Catholic Church to dialogue and fraternity with the Jewish People, as well as unequivocally condemning anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. He also highlighted the significance of the work of the Bilateral Commission itself, about to hold its meeting on the subject of Catholic and Jewish teaching on Creation and the Environment, wishing it a "profitable dialogue on such a timely and important theme". Similarly Rabbi Riccardo Di Segni, Chief Rabbi of Rome, in his words on this occasion emphasized the mutual obligation of Christians and Jews to work together to protect the environment in keeping with the Biblical charge (Gen-2:15).

However, the meeting also took place in the shadow of the catastrophic tragedy in Haiti. Indeed, the aforementioned gathering in the synagogue, opened with a minute of silence in solidarity with the victims. The members of the Commission expressed their prayers for the victims and for the recovery of the survivors and applauded the international rescue and aid for the reconstruction of Haiti.

During the course of the meeting the members attended the moving presentation of Fr. Patrick Desbois at the Pontifical Gregorian University that highlighted the work of Yachad in Unum to locate and memorialize the unidentified sites in Eastern Europe of mass murder during the Shoah. The commission urged the respective religious communities to support and publicise this very important work, in order to learn from the tragedies of the past to protect and respect the sanctity of human life everywhere so that atrocities will never reoccur.

PRESS STATEMENT

1. The ninth meeting of the above Commission, was held in Rome, following the historic visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the Great Synagogue which had been attended also by the members of the Commission and at which the Pope categorically confirmed the commitment of the Catholic Church and its will to deepen dialogue and fraternity with Judaism and the Jewish People in accordance with *Nostra Aetate*, the subsequent teachings of the Magisterium and in particular of his predecessor John Paul II. "On this path we can walk together aware of the differences that exist between us, but also aware of the fact that when we succeed in uniting our hearts and our hands in response to the Lord's call, His light comes closer and shines on all the peoples of the world" (Papal Address at the Synagogue of Rome, 17 January 2010, sect. 8). The Pope specifically praised the work, significance and achievements of the Bilateral Commission about to hold its meeting on the subject of Catholic and Jewish teaching on Creation and the Environment and wished the Commission a "profitable dialogue on such a timely and important theme".

2. The meeting was opened by the chairmen Cardinal Jorge Mejía and Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen who paid tribute to the late Ambassador Shmuel Hadas whose

contribution was so instrumental in the establishment of the commission.

3. The opening presentations focused on the tensions between secular environmentalist movements and religious perspectives and emphasized that biblical teaching views nature as being endowed with sanctity that flows from the Creator. It is He who has charged humanity as the summit of his inherently good Creation (cf. Gen 1:31) with the obligation of responsible custodianship (cf. Gen 2:15). Accordingly while freedom and autonomy are given to humanity to develop and advance the natural resources, as it is written "the Heavens are the Heavens of the Lord and earth has been given to humankind" (Ps 115:16), these must always be expressed in a manner that respects Divine sovereignty of the Universe, as it is written "the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it" (Ps 24:1).

4. Humankind today faces a unique environmental crisis which is substantially the product of unbridled material and technological exploitation. While this challenge must obviously be addressed through the necessary technical means as well as self restraint, humility and discipline; the participants emphasized the essential need for society to recognize the transcendent dimension of Creation that is critical to ensure sustainable development and progress in an ethically responsible manner. Not everything that is technically feasible is morally acceptable. It is this consciousness that ensures that every aspect of human advancement promotes the wellbeing of future generations and sanctifies the Divine Name, just as its absence leads to destructive consequences for humanity and environment and profanes the Divine Name.

5. The Biblical Tradition that gives unique dignity to the human person must not be understood in terms of domination but in terms of respect and solidarity. This requires of us a sense of a "human ecology" in which our responsibility for the eco-system is bound up with and reflective of our obligations to one another and in particular "a special generosity towards the poor, towards women and children, strangers, the sick, the weak and the needy" (Papal Address at the Synagogue of Rome, 17 January 2010, sect. 7).

6. The ethical aspect of human intervention in the natural order lies in the limitation on the power of science and its claim to absoluteness, and in the expression of human solidarity and moral responsibility towards all. To that end the bilateral commission strongly urges that all scientific innovation and development work in close consultation with religious ethical guidance. Similarly States and international bodies should engage in close consultation with religious ethical leadership in order to ensure that progress be a blessing rather than a curse. A genuine environmental ethic is a key condition for world peace and harmony.

7. Above all, the critical importance of a moral religious education at all levels was highlighted in order to guarantee responsible scientific and social development.

Rome,
January 19th, 2010 – Shvat 4th, 5790

Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen

(Chairman of the Jewish Delegation)

Chief Rabbi Ratson Arussi

Chief Rabbi David Brodman

Chief Rabbi Joseph Levi

Chief Rabbi David Rosen

Rabbi Prof. Daniel Sperber

Mr. Oded Wiener

Jorge Cardinal Mejía

(Chairman of the Catholic Delegation)

Patriarch Fouad Twal

Archbishop Elias Chacour

Archbishop Antonio Franco

Archbishop Bruno Forte

Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo

Mons. Pier Francesco Fumagalli

P. Pierbattista Pizzaballa O.F.M.

P. Norbert J. Hofmann S.D.B.