

Report – March 2008

Rome served as the main focus of our international interreligious affairs during the month of March. Subordinating the spectrum of our ongoing work with different religious communities and representatives were our salvage efforts in the wake of the Pope's new version of the prayer for the Jews in the Tridentine Latin liturgy for Easter which prays for the Jewish acceptance of the Christian faith.

In the wake of the concern I had officially conveyed to Cardinal Kasper, the President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry, I had received a letter of reassurance from him stating not only that this concerned a very tiny population and that 99.9% of Catholics would be reciting the Easter liturgy in the vernacular according to the 1970 text which prays for the welfare of the Jews without any mention of Jesus; but that even this version is expressing a hope for the full messianic future and implied absolutely no change in the Church's position and attitude toward the Jewish People; that the Church would not and could not renege on the declaration *Nostra Aetate* affirming the eternal validity of the Divine Covenant with the Jewish People; and that this text implied absolutely no authorization for any proselytizing among Jews, to which the Church remains firmly opposed.

Prior to the AJC BOG Institute's meetings in Rome, two series of meetings had been scheduled to take place in Rome in March. One of these was the meeting of the Steering Committee of the International Jewish Catholic Liaison Committee (ILC) which I chair together with Cardinal Walter Kasper and which took place as scheduled (see below); and prior to this, the ninth meeting of the Bilateral Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Vatican had been scheduled to take place over a three day period.

In the wake of the release of the Pope's reformulated text of "the prayer for the Jews" and in addition the extreme stand of the Italian rabbinate breaking off ties with the Church, the Chief Rabbinate had asked for clarification from the Vatican of the implications of the prayer, before it would agree to go ahead with the planned meeting. In light of Cardinal Kasper's letter to me, the Chief Rabbis of Israel indicated that if the substance of the letter was confirmed at the highest level of the Church – if not by the Pope, then by Cardinal Bertone, the Cardinal Secretary of State - then they would be satisfied and allow the bilateral dialogue to continue. However the time factor proved to be too tight and I was asked to represent the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in Rome to negotiate this process.

I was able to report to the Chief Rabbis and to the AJC BOG delegation that it appeared that we had successfully negotiated a text that would be issued by Cardinal Bertone . In fact the text was endorsed by the Pope in a meeting with Cardinal Kasper earlier on the day the latter met with the AJC delegation. However the text was also submitted to the Council for Doctrine and Faith and as this was just prior to the Catholic holy period leading up to Easter, the matter was delayed and we are expecting its release shortly. I was also able

to hold meetings with other Cardinals and heads of councils and departments in the Vatican whose work is relevant to our bilateral relationship.

Thursday March 13th was the day of the meeting of the Steering Committee of the Jewish-Catholic International Liaison Committee (made up of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC.), which is an umbrella organization representing World Jewry to other world faiths and is the official Jewish partner of the Vatican through Cardinal Kasper's office, and which I currently chair. Our Steering Committee meeting had two parts to it. The "usual" business concerned preparations for our next biennial conference that is scheduled to take place in Budapest, November 9-13, the first time in the more than thirty years of the ILC that the conference was being held in Eastern Europe. The second part of the meeting concerned the initiative to involve Muslims in our dialogue. Both the Catholic Church and IJCIC have reiterated that this development would in no way replace the special and exclusive bilateral relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, but would be a very important additional dimension to their dialogue. To this end, the meeting also involved Cardinal Tauran, who is the Vatican Cardinal responsible for relations with Islam; Sheikh Dr. Abaddi of Morocco who heads the Royal Moroccan Council of Muslim Scholars; and Enrique Ojeda of the Foundation of the Three Cultures based in Seville Spain which is under the patronage of the Kings of Morocco and Spain and managed by the Kingdom of Morocco and the Government of Andalusia. This Foundation has agreed to host this trilateral dialogue which we agreed to hold next Spring in Seville.

Thus the path had been well prepared for the AJC BOG Inst. delegation that met with both Cardinals Kasper and Tauran as well as with Monsignor Parolin at the Secretariat of State. Culminating these successful meetings was a very special Friday night Shabbat dinner attended by Cardinals, Bishops, Ambassadors, leaders of the Rome Jewish community and many other notable guests, that was held in a unique atmosphere of fellowship, song and celebration.