

**18TH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC-JEWISH
LIAISON COMMITTEE (ILC)
BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA) 5–8 July 2004**

JOINT DECLARATION

Relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People have undergone far-reaching change since the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* (1965). That Declaration highlighted Christianity's Jewish roots and the rich spiritual patrimony shared by Jews and Christians. Over the last quarter century, Pope John Paul II has used every opportunity to promote dialogue between our two faith communities which he sees as intimately related at the very heart of our respective identities. This fraternal dialogue has engendered mutual understanding and respect. It is our hope that it will continue to resonate in ever-widening circles and touch the minds and hearts of Catholics and Jews - and the wider community.

The 18th International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee Meeting was held in Buenos Aires, from July 5-8, 2004. This encounter, convened for the first time in Latin America, has been devoted to the subject of *Tzedeq* and *Tzedaqah* (Justice and Charity), in their theoretical aspects and practical applications. Our deliberations have been inspired by God's command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" (Lev. 19:18; Mt. 22:39). Drawing from our different perspectives, we have renewed our joint commitment to defend and promote human dignity, as deriving from the biblical affirmation that every human being is created in the likeness and image of God (Gen. 1:26). We recall Pope John XXIII's advocacy of human rights for all God's children enunciated in his seminal encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) and we pay special tribute to him for initiating the fundamental change in the Catholic - Jewish relationship.

Our joint commitment to justice is deeply rooted in both our faiths. We recall the tradition of helping the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the stranger in our midst in accordance with God's injunction (Ex. 22:20-22; Mt 25:31-46). The Sages of Israel developed a broad doctrine of justice and charity for all, based upon an elevated understanding of the concept of *Tzedeq*. Building on the Church's tradition, Pope John Paul II, in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), reminded Christians that a true relationship with God requires a strong commitment to service of one's neighbor.

While God created human beings in their diversity, He endowed them with the same dignity. We share the conviction that every person has the right to be treated with justice and equality. This right includes an equitable sharing of God's bounty and graciousness (*chesed*).

Given the global dimensions of poverty, injustice and discrimination, we have a clear religious obligation to show concern for the poor and those deprived of their political, social and cultural rights. Jesus, deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of his day, made a commitment to the poor a priority of his ministry. The Talmud affirms that the Holy One,

Blessed be God, always cares for the needy. Today, this concern for the poor must embrace the vast numbers on all continents of the hungry, the homeless, the orphan, victims of AIDS, those without adequate medical care and all those who at present lack hope for a better future. In Jewish tradition, the highest form of charity is removing the obstacles that prevent the poor from rising out of their poverty. In recent years, the Church has emphasized its preferential option for the poor. Jews and Christians have an equal obligation to work for justice with charity (Tzedakah) which ultimately will lead to *Shalom* for all humanity. In fidelity to our distinct religious traditions, we see this common commitment to justice and charity as man's cooperation in the Divine plan to bring about a better world.

In the light of this common commitment, we recognize the need to address the following immediate challenges: the growing economic disparity among people, increasing ecological devastation, the negative aspects of globalization, and the urgent need for international peace-making and reconciliation.

We, therefore, salute the joint initiatives of Catholic and Jewish International and National organizations which have already begun to address the needs of the indigent, the hungry, the sick, the young, the undereducated and the aged. Building upon these actions of social justice we pledge ourselves to redouble our efforts to address the pressing needs of all out of our common commitment to justice and charity.

As we approach the 40th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* - the ground-breaking declaration of the Second Vatican Council the consequence of which repudiated the deicide charge against Jews, reaffirmed the Jewish roots of Christianity and rejected anti-Semitism -- we take note of the many positive changes within the Catholic Church with respect to her relationship with the Jewish People. These past forty years of our fraternal dialogue stand in stark contrast to almost two millennia of a "teaching of contempt" and all its painful consequences. We draw encouragement from the fruits of our collective strivings which include the recognition of the unique and unbroken covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish People and the total rejection of anti-Semitism in all its forms, including anti-Zionism as a more recent manifestation of anti-Semitism.

For its part, the Jewish community has evinced a growing willingness to engage in interreligious dialogue and joint action regarding religious, social and communal issues on the local, national and international levels, as exemplified in the new direct dialogue between the Chief Rabbinate in Israel and the Holy See. Further, the Jewish community has made strides in educational programming about Christianity, the elimination of prejudice and the importance of Jewish - Christian dialogue. Additionally, the Jewish community has become aware of, and deplors, the phenomenon of anti-Catholicism in all its forms, manifesting itself in society at large.

On the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps, we declare our determination to prevent the reemergence of anti-Semitism which led to genocide and the Shoah. We stand together at this moment in time, following major international conferences on this problem, most recently in Berlin and at the United Nations in New York. We recall the words of Pope John Paul II that anti-Semitism is a sin against God and humanity.

We commit ourselves to the struggle against terrorism. We live in a new millennium, already stained by the attacks of September 11, 2001 and subsequent terrorist outrages world-

wide. We meet on the 10th anniversary of two tragic experiences of terrorism here in Buenos Aires. Terror, in all its forms, and killing "in the name of God" can never be justified. Terror is a sin against man and God. We call on men and women of all faiths to support international efforts to eradicate this threat to life, so that all nations can live together in peace and security on the basis of *Tzedeq* and *Tzedaqah*.

We pledge that the promises we have made to each other here in Buenos Aires will be implemented and disseminated throughout our communities so that the work of Justice and Charity shall, indeed, lead to God's greatest gift: peace.