

COMMISSION
FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

13 February, 2008

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Chief Rabbi David Rosen
Chairman
IJCIC
165 East 56th Street
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Dear Rabbi Rosen.

Upon my return to Rome, I found your letter of 10 February 2008 regarding the prayer formulated for the extraordinary rite of the Good Friday liturgy. I well understand the sensitivities of some of the more traditional Jewish circles. However, if one reads exactly what is said in the reformulated prayer one sees that nothing is withdrawn from *Nostra aetate*; indeed, this text remains totally valid and fundamental for our Jewish-Christian relations. It is absolutely not the intention of anyone in the Roman Curia to step back and interrupt our fruitful dialogue, which for us is irreversible.

Yet we must not lose sight of the fact that this dialogue presupposes that both Jews and Christians maintain their identities and remain free to express their respective faiths. From the very beginning of our dialogue it was and it remains clear that notwithstanding all that we have in common there is a fundamental difference in Christology which is constitutive for both your Jewish and our own Christian identity. To give witness of our Christian faith, as is expressed in the reformulated prayer, is therefore in no way a return to the language of contempt but an expression of mutual respect in our respective otherness.

In reformulating the prayer of the now extraordinary liturgy, the Pope wanted to avoid formulations which were perceived by many Jews to be offensive, but he wanted at the same time to remain in line with the intrinsic linguistic and stylistic structure of this liturgy and therefore not simply replace the prayer for the prayer of the ordinary liturgy, which we must not forget is used by the vast majority of Catholic communities.

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The reformulated text no longer speaks about the conversion of the Jews, as some Jewish critics wrongly affirm. The text is a prayer inspired by Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 11, which is the very text that speaks also of the unbroken covenant. It takes up Paul's eschatological hope that at the end of times all Israel will be saved. As a prayer the text lays all in the hands of God and not in ours. It says nothing about the *how* and *when*. Therefore there is nothing about missionary activities, by which we may take Israel's salvation in our hands. We leave all in the hands of the one who is the only master and Lord of history.

I cannot see why this prayer should present any reason to interrupt our dialogue. On the contrary, it is an opportunity and a challenge to continue the dialogue on what we have in common and what differentiates us in our Messianic hope.

I am happy that after some perplexities we now hear more and more voices from the Jewish world seeing things in a realistic way, and I do hope that this letter can be a contribution to overcome the misunderstandings and grievances.

Yours sincerely,

Walter Cardinal Kasper
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President