

Dialogue Documents and Their Call to Implementation: A Reflection on Statements and Initiatives about Jewish-Catholic and Muslim-Catholic Relations

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Documents “telling” about dialogue often seem to be much more in the public eye than experiences of lived dialogue. How are dialogue statements calling to a practical implementation? This article guides the reader through some statements that have been issued in the past decades from the Catholic Church and from some Jewish and Muslim leaders addressing the Church and Christian leaders—in particular Catholics—on the theme of interreligious relationships and dialogue. The article particularly focuses on the calls to practical implementation of advice or of suggested theological and social attitudes and mentions some selected initiatives inspired by these documents. The article shows how dialogue documents could be different, responding to a specific context, as well as how multiple levels of actions are needed in order to support dialogical attitudes in our societies.

Keywords: dialogue, theological statements, implementation, Nostra Aetate, Jewish-Catholic, Muslim-Catholic, interreligious dialogue

I recently had the chance to speak to a Catholic Church leader engaged in the field of interreligious dialogue, who told me that at any meeting he attends there is always the expectation that a statement or document will be issued. It seems that documents “telling” about dialogue are much more in the public eye than experiences of lived dialogue. Could we have one without the other? How do dialogue statements call us to a practical implementation?

In this article I will guide the reader through some statements that have been issued in the past decades from the Catholic Church and some Jewish and Muslim leaders addressing the Church and Christian leaders—in particular Catholics—on the theme of interreligious relationships and dialogue. I will focus on the first decades of these efforts, exploring Catholic documents and actions regarding Christian-Jewish relations from 1965 to 2000 from the Catholic side in Jewish-Christian relations, while examining Jewish documents from 2000 onwards. As for Muslim-Catholic relations, I will start from *Nostra Aetate* but then move closer to the present day, surveying texts and initiatives explicitly tackling Muslim-Catholic dialogue from both sides. In particular I will look for calls to practical implementation of advice or suggested theological and social attitudes and make some references to a few selected actions or initiatives inspired by these documents. My focus is on the documents, and my goal is to retrace the passage from the prevailing attention to theological statements about the other to the increasingly acknowledged necessity of working at the grassroots level to make a new “dialogical” perspective part of believers’ life.

From *Nostra Aetate* to the Year 2000: New Direction in Catholic-Jewish Relations

“Vatican II broke much new ground”¹ in relations between Catholics and followers of other religions, through documents such as the Declaration *Nostra Aetate* as well as passages in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the Decree *Ad Gentes* and the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium*

¹ Gerald O’Collins, “Implementing ‘Nostra Aetate,’” *Gregorianum* 87, no. 4 (2006): 714.

et Spes. In particular, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, radically changed Catholics’ interaction with Jews and Judaism. Gregory Baum, who attended the Council, claims that “chapter four of *Nostra Aetate*, that concerned with the Church's relationship with the Jewish People, represented the most radical change in the ordinary magisterium of the Catholic Church to emerge from the Council.”² The world had just witnessed the horrifying tragedy of the Shoah and the Catholic Church felt the need to call for a change in the Catholic approach and theology regarding Judaism and Jews.

This move was prepared and in some senses demanded by other events. Some individuals at the beginning of the twentieth century started engaging with Jewish-Christian dialogue,³ but it wasn't until the end of World War II that explicit steps were made. In 1948 the French Jewish historian Jules Isaac who, before the war, was the Superintendent of Public Instruction in France, published the book *Jesus and Israel*. In this book he proposed eighteen points that he wanted to "submit for the examination of Christians of good will—who are agreed in principle on the need for rectification."⁴ Unfortunately, for centuries the idea that the whole of the Jewish people was to be held responsible for a deicide was common and caused discrimination and violence. Isaac saw a way out through a change in Catholic education by making the Old Testament more known to Catholics and stressing that this "was the Holy Scripture of Jews before becoming the Holy Scripture of Christians,"⁵ that the "Jewish people safeguarded the fundamental belief in God, then transmitted it to the Christian world,"⁶ that Jesus was a Jew and observed the Law, and that those who had him condemned were not representing the whole people but part of an oligarchic caste not even recognized by everyone. In 1960 Jules Isaac, thanks to the intermediary of a woman fully dedicated to ecumenical dialogue, Maria Vingiani,⁷ met Pope John XXIII. Isaac confronted the Pope "with what he called the 'teaching of contempt' of the Jewish people and asked the Pope to address this issue in the Church."⁸

What Isaac presented and the way the Catholic Church moved during the Second Vatican Council show an important and undeniable link between theological statements about the other and the need for a revision in education. This is key to the change advocated in documents starting from *Nostra Aetate* onwards. In NA we read:

What happened in His [Christ's] passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected and accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that

² Gregory Baum quoted in Daniel Madigan, “*Nostra Aetate* and the questions it chose to leave open,” *Gregorianum* 87, no. 4 (2006): 781.

³ Jonahthan Magonet, “The Growth of Interfaith Dialogue,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 48, no. 2 (Autumn 2015): 38.

⁴ Jules Isaac, *Jesus and Israel* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 401.

⁵ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, 401.

⁶ Isaac, *Jesus and Israel*, 401.

⁷ Francesco Capretti, *La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei: la ricezione di Nostra Aetate 4 dal Vaticano II a oggi* (Bologna: EMI, 2010), 107.

⁸ Clare Jardine, "Teaching about Catholic-Jewish relations: some guidelines to assist the work of teachers in Catholic schools," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 7, no. 1 (2015): 46.

in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.⁹

Working on education of younger generations and on preaching in local communities allowed new reading of events and interpretation of the Scriptures as well as theological approaches to progressively become widespread beyond the clergy. This is clearly a long process and we will see how subsequent documents insisted on this direction because, even after decades, prejudices were still alive in some Catholic contexts.

As a remarkable major first step in formally tackling the Jewish-Catholic relationship, §4 of *Nostra Aetate* prepares the way for further contributions. Looking at it more than fifty years after, it is clear that potential additions or changes might be suggested. As Marchadour and Neuhaus state, “[t]he document is formulated uniquely from the Christian perspective on the Jewish people and says nothing about how the Jewish people see themselves.”¹⁰ In fact, *Nostra Aetate* marked a first step in a long line and subsequent documents would insist on the need to hear from the Jews about how they define themselves today¹¹ in order to enter a relationship not only with books and ideas but with living human beings.

The fundamental approach inaugurated by *Nostra Aetate*, with its internal revision as a starting point regarding Catholic theology and scriptural hermeneutic, should not, however, be underestimated. Without insisting on that level at the very beginning, the door would not have been opened to the new look at the other needed to meet him/her with fresh eyes. Speaking of Muslim-Catholic dialogue, the former archbishop of Algiers, Henri Teissier, says something that we can easily adapt to Jewish-Catholic relations: “there is no respect of the other as long as we have not been able to make room for him/her in our vision of faith.”¹²

On December 1, 1974, nine years after *Nostra Aetate*, the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews—instituted less than two months earlier—felt the need to issue *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate No. 4*. It was a document focusing only on—as its name states—*Nostra Aetate* §4, the longest section, which was at the origin of the whole document itself. The *Guidelines* state that “over the past nine years many steps in this direction have been taken in various countries.”¹³ However, they continue, “[t]his seems the right moment to propose, following the guidelines of the Council, some concrete suggestions born of experience, hoping that they will help to bring into actual existence in the life of the Church the intentions expressed in the conciliar document.”¹⁴ While restating the basics in terms of approaches

⁹ Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, October 28, 1965, §4, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

¹⁰ Alan Marchadour and David Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible, and History* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 162.

¹¹ The first official Catholic document inaugurating this approach was the 1973 declaration of the Commission for Relations with Judaism of the French Bishops, *The Christian Attitude towards Judaism: Pastoral Orientations of the Episcopal Committee for Relations with Judaism*. See Marchadour and Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible, and History*, 163.

¹² Henri Teissier, *Cristiani in Algeria, La Chiesa della debolezza* (Bologna: EMI, 2004), 95.

¹³ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate No. 4*, December 1, 1974, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19741201_nostra-aetate_en.html, Preamble.

¹⁴ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines*, Preamble.

(condemnation of anti-Semitism and discrimination) and inviting Catholics to acquire a better knowledge of Judaism seen through the eyes of contemporary Jews—following the example of the declaration from the French Bishops mentioned in note 11—the document enters into four fields of implementation: dialogue, liturgy, teaching and education, and joint social action.

For each of the above-mentioned fields multiple suggested actions are listed in the document and it is important to stress that the material which the Commission drew on to draft the document seems to be the outcome of almost a decade of practical implementation of a new kind of relationship favored by the theological changes suggested by *Nostra Aetate*. A significant increase in dialogue initiatives occurred at all levels and offered the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews the ground to reflect on how to better walk in that direction. Among the suggestions for implementation in the document, we find: getting to know each other and studying together; common meetings "in the presence of God;"¹⁵ taking care in homilies so that the meaning of liturgical readings which might show Jewish people in an unfavorable light are not distorted; attention to the content of catechism and religious textbooks, history books and media, with a particular focus on training of educators and the possibility of creating chairs for Jewish studies and collaboration with Jewish scholars within Catholic institutions; as well as the effort to work together for social justice and peace.

Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, then President of the Commission, concludes the document with two fundamental ideas: first of all, the consideration that dealing with Christian-Jewish relation should not be a matter of interest only for those Christians living in places where there are Jewish communities,¹⁶ but rather a call to all Christians; second, the local responsibility for implementation of concrete actions in this field is given to the bishop, since he is the one who knows what best to do at the pastoral level and who might be competent to take part in commissions or secretariats charged with translating at a local level the suggestions made in this document. These two clarifications must not be overlooked because they show the call for a more local and widespread attention to the topic. Relationship with Jews (and with any other community or group of people) are not only to be considered when and if the other is present in one's city or country, because it is not only a matter of actions to be undertaken but also of education, and of theological thought that needs to be nurtured.

If education in general is stressed as a main field of implementation, academic and religious training are evidently an important context where the change must be felt in the academic offerings to students and seminarians. Evidence about this in the United States comes from the report written by Dominican Sister Rose Thering, professor of education at Seton Hall University, who in 1985 gathered data from 209 Catholic colleges and universities and 123 seminaries (123) to determine the impact of *Nostra Aetate*, the 1974 document just discussed, and the 1975 U.S. bishops' Statement on Jewish-Christian relations.¹⁷ This was the second survey of this kind, the first one

¹⁵ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Guidelines*, Dialogue.

¹⁶ "The problem of Jewish-Christian relations concerns the Church as such, since it is when 'pondering her own mystery' that she encounters the mystery of Israel. Therefore, even in areas where no Jewish communities exist, this remains an important problem" (*Guidelines*, Conclusion). We should notice how throughout the decades the language as well experienced an evolution. The description of Jewish-Christian relations as a "problem" is not used any longer.

¹⁷ Gerard Sherry, "Jewish Studies in U.S. Catholic Institutions of Higher Learning," *Shofar* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1986): 36.

having been carried out in 1970. Thering reported that "[a]lmost every college engaged in an implementation of the conciliar statement, the guidelines and the bishops' statement in one way or another, that students, faculty, administrators and the community (both Christian and Jewish) developed a deeper understanding, awareness and appreciation not only of each other, but of their faith and tradition."¹⁸ As an example, she mentions the increasing number of institutions offering a course on the Holocaust: in 1970 only 1 percent of the academic institutions had such a course, in 1985 26.6 percent did. As for the seminaries, the rate went from 6.8 to 10 percent.¹⁹

The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews issued a second document in 1985: *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*. Although most of this document is concerned with interpretation of Scriptures and liturgy (relations between the Old and New Testament; Jewish roots of Christianity; the Jews in the New Testament; the liturgy; Judaism and Christianity in history), it should be stressed that the first chapter of these *Notes* is on "Religious Teaching and Judaism" and calls again for a careful respect of the other and knowledge about today's Judaism through the way Jews define themselves.

The document builds upon the magisterium of Pope John Paul II²⁰ who is known for his groundbreaking attitude and words related to Jewish-Catholic relations. Karol Wojtyła grew up in Wadowice, Poland, a town with a Jewish population of about 25 percent. His first-hand experience of the Holocaust, which killed the almost entirety of the Polish Jewish population, and his personal relationships with Jews, explains much of his approach.²¹

As David Rosen, the American Jewish Committee's director of International Interreligious Affairs, stated forty years after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, "the implications of *Nostra Aetate* can only be properly understood in the light of subsequent teaching of the Magisterium [...], the statements of Pope Paul VI, and in particular the extensive body of Pope John Paul II's declarations on this subject."²² According to Rabbi Rosen, sometimes visible actions have the potential of showing to a much larger public what otherwise would remain a matter of discussion solely for a small elite.

With the first papal visit to a synagogue in modern history in 1986 in Rome, many people in the Jewish world were already able to visualize the achievements reached. Some others realized that a great change had happened with the establishment of full relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel in 1993, but many more saw this with Pope John Paul II's visit to Israel in 2000. The reason why actions are needed is eloquently explained by Rabbi Rosen through a metaphor: the Jewish people "had their ears boxed so often in the course of history that their eardrums are damaged to the extent that they are often unable to distinguish between evil sounds

¹⁸ Sherry, "Jewish Studies in U.S. Catholic Institutions," 37.

¹⁹ Sherry, "Jewish Studies in U.S. Catholic Institutions," 37.

²⁰ The 1985 document cites extensively from the Pope's speeches. For example, part of John Paul II's words on March 6, 1982 to the delegates of Episcopal Conferences entrusted with relations with Judaism are quoted: "To assess it (the 'common patrimony' of the Church and Judaism) carefully in itself and with due awareness of the faith and religious life of the Jewish people as they are professed and practiced still today can greatly help us to understand better certain aspects of the pastoral life of the Church."

²¹ Marchadour and Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible, and History*, 166.

²² David Rosen, "Jewish and Israeli Perspectives 40 Years after Vatican II," in *Nostra Aetate: Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations*, eds. Neville Lamdan and Alberto Melloni (Münster: LIT-Verlag, 2007), 176.

and beautiful music.... However, it is the hearing that has been damaged, not the vision. Thus a new reality can be heard, as it were, only when it can be seen.”²³

It can be therefore argued that actions having a media impact—such as the Pope's visit to Israel—are helpful to educate a larger group of people than those who are already aware of the existence of documents describing a new relation with the other. Diplomatic actions too have an impact on the larger society, although quite often these are neglected in analysis related to dialogue developments.

Two other levels of interaction stemmed from the suggested direction in Jewish-Catholic relations inaugurated by *Nostra Aetate*. The first is the establishment of stable committees gathering religious leaders from both sides for regular meetings.²⁴ Even if such activity is definitely not known by most people, the growing level of interaction between key religious leaders is likely to have an important impact on their communities. The second one is the spiritual encounter in prayer. For the Catholic Church, a turning point was the first World Day of Prayer for Peace, called for by John Paul II and gathering leaders of other world religions. In the relationship with Judaism, as well as with other religions, this step was an acknowledgment of the value of prayer in other traditions. This event “gave a palpable vision of this striving for a world built on peace, justice, and reconciliation,”²⁵ showing that believers can act together for the common good but also raise their voices to God. Twenty years after *Nostra Aetate*, this shows another layer of encounter and implementation of dialogue.

A last document was issued by the same Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews before the year 2000: *We Remember: a Reflection on the Shoah*. Differently from the previous documents, it mostly reflects, as the title says, on the past, hoping to make sure that the “errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the Church”²⁶ who did not stand against what was happening would not be repeated. The way forward is mostly identified with the renewal of “the awareness of the Hebrew roots”²⁷ of Christian faith, but the document does not offer specific insights on how to make sure this will happen in Catholic communities, since its focus is more on reflection about the past.

After having considered some of the main actions undertaken directly by the Holy See up to the year 2000 (meaningful statements and actions, diplomatic initiatives, establishment of committees for theological and academic discussions), we will quickly see repercussions of these changes at the grassroots in the specific Italian context, which we will take as an example. The importance of spreading information and raising awareness about Judaism in Catholic environments that might have been still negatively influenced by prejudices was at the basis of the establishment of the *Service International de documentation judéo-chrétienne* (SIDIC) in Rome in 1965. This

²³ Rosen, "Jewish and Israeli Perspectives 40 Years after Vatican II," 182.

²⁴ Rabbi Rosen mentions the permanent committee for interreligious dialogue established by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel with the Holy See that has produced several bilateral meetings over the years ("Jewish and Israeli Perspectives 40 Years after Vatican II," 184).

²⁵ Marchadour and Neuhaus, *The Land, the Bible, and History*, 160.

²⁶ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah* §IV, March 16, 1998, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_16031998_shoah_en.html.

²⁷ Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *We Remember* §V.

body was run by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, a Catholic congregation whose vocation was already that of fostering Jewish-Christian dialogue. “A fruit of the Second Vatican Council,”²⁸ the SIDIC was born directly out of the will of Catholic religious hierarchy of different countries (USA, France, Mexico, Holland, Israel, Canada) who were already engaged in dialogue, had participated in the Council, and asked the Sisters of Sion if they could offer this further service to the Universal Church.

The Congregation of Our Lady of Sion was founded in 1843 by the Catholic priest Marie Theodore Ratisbonne, who was born in a Jewish family, and has always been active in education. The SIDIC was based in Rome but became part of an international effort to widespread and deepen the insights received in *Nostra Aetate* §4. In fact, its main goal was education and the center, active until 2009, gathered material and documents about Judaism and Jewish-Christian relations, organized conferences and seminars, and published a magazine (1968–2003) that discussed a theme from the Jewish and Christian perspective in each issue.

At a local level in Italy, the first initiative I want to mention actually preceded any official statement by the Catholic Church and created that environment showing the possibility of a new style of relationships between Jews and Christians that would be later described by *Nostra Aetate*. The Jewish-Christian Friendship (*Amicizia ebraico-cristiana*, AEC) was founded in Florence in 1950, just a few years after the end of World War II. “All members, without renouncing anything in their creed nor accepting confusions or doctrinal compromises, desire to understand and love each other, as well as to spiritually collaborate in the defense of common moral and ideal values,”²⁹ affirm the Statutes, which insist as well on the need to reach out to new people and make the AEC program known to the larger public through mass media. Other local branches of AEC arose later, in the 1980s, and then joined in a Federation.

A strong impulse in Italy arrived from the Secretariat for Ecumenical Activities (*Segreteria Attività Ecumeniche*, SAE) founded in 1966 by Maria Vingiani. She was so much marked by her meeting and friendship with Jules Isaac that she imparted to her ecumenical efforts a deep attention to Jewish-Christian dialogue. In 1968 the SAE organized its national meeting at the monastery of Camaldoli; this was the beginning of another reflection that led in 1980 to the Colloquia of Camaldoli, aiming to gather Christians and Jews and live the “kairos of dialogue.”³⁰

In 1983 the SAE requested the Italian Bishops' Conference to establish a Day for Judaism.³¹ This request was finally granted in 1990. The day before the beginning of the week of prayer for Christian Unity, January 17, was to become a day consecrated to learning more about Judaism in its relation with Christianity. This Day allowed the flourishing of local initiatives in dioceses, parishes, universities and seminaries so that the larger community could be offered a chance to discover something about Judaism and maybe meet with some Jews. In 2010, Capretti comments, “Vingiani's way of describing this Day as a 'school of formation' is indicative of the attempt of

²⁸ Sir, “Dialogo: dopo 43 anni di servizio chiude il centro SIDIC di Roma,” May 5, 2009, <https://agensir.it/quotidiano/2009/5/5/dialogo-dopo-43-anni-di-servizio-chiude-il-centro-sidic-di-roma>.

²⁹ Amicizia ebraico-cristiana di Firenze, “Statuto,” 1950, http://www.aecna.org/Amicizia_Ebraico_Cristiana_di_Napoli/Statuto.html. Translation from Italian by the author.

³⁰ Capretti, *La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei*, 113. Translation from Italian by the author.

³¹ Capretti, *La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei*, 67.

entering, through this initiative, in the vital folds of ecclesial reception.”³² It is actually evident in dialogue initiatives that specialists and people deeply committed to dialogue represent quite a limited number. However, it should be highlighted that these people were and are able to offer food for thought to a larger number of coreligionists.³³ Through initiatives, redaction of resources and visible actions, the few can aim to reach many.

Another core action undertaken by the Italian Church to invite a new perception in Jewish-Catholic relations was the work done on the Catechism for both young people and adults. Catechisms are used for the transmission of faith and since *Nostra Aetate* insisted on key elements of interpretation with regards to Jews and Judaism, one of the first concrete examples of reception of such interpretations ought to be the Catechism. In 1979, the Italian Bishops’ Conference shared a text of the Catechism for young people for consultation and experiment. The possibility of working on this *ad experimentum* text before its final version allowed those responsible to reconsider and adjust the way themes such as the relationship between the two Testaments, the presentation of Judaism during the New Testament age—in particular the way Pharisees are described—and the image that is offered of contemporary Jews were tackled.³⁴ The two texts that were then published in 1993 (*I chose you*) and 1997 (*Come and see*) reflected the new style of Jewish-Christian relations better, although they were still lacking of a relevant presentation about contemporary Judaism.³⁵

To recapitulate, drawing on preceding experiences and contacts, the Second Vatican Council worked on providing a theological framework fostering a new look at the relationship with people of other faith traditions, in particular Jews, through *Nostra Aetate* §4. This fundamental text changed the ground of Jewish-Catholic relationships and allowed for further developments. Other documents followed and built on it, inviting—now that the first step was made within the Catholic Church in questioning her theological way of dealing with Judaism and Jews—Catholics to take into account the way Jews see themselves, therefore fostering a dialogue directly with them.

As far as fields of implementation are concerned, the documents issued by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews in 1974 and 1985 already identify dialogue initiatives, education, liturgy, and joint social actions. We saw in our brief survey how education really plays a pivotal role: dialogue among experts is providing an authoritative way of reaching communities but attention has to be paid to all level of instructions to make sure that the changes suggested in documents reach people from primary school to seminaries. And people are not reached only via schooling: politics and media play a big role. Therefore another field of implementation that should not be overlooked is the one related to public initiatives such as Pope John Paul II’s visit to the Rome synagogue or his visit to the Holy Land and prayer at the Western Wall, as well as his prayer with religious world leaders in Assisi: these are images that went all around the world and gave people the clear feeling that something was changing.

³² Capretti, *La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei*, 71. Translation from Italian by the author.

³³ Capretti comments: “It seems therefore that the Day was the result of a path walked by few but with the intention of reaching many.” (*La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei*, 71. Translation from Italian by the author).

³⁴ Capretti, *La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei*, 74–75.

³⁵ Capretti, *La Chiesa italiana e gli ebrei*, 76.

Looking at Christianity from the Jewish Side: Between Theology and Action

On September 10, 2000 a full-page text was published in the New England edition of *The New York Times*. It was a statement entitled *Dabru Emet* (“Speak the Truth”, from the verse of Zechariah 8:16) with the subtitle “A Jewish statement on Christians and Christianity.” It was not the expression of a Jewish denomination, rather of an “interdenominational group of Jewish scholars”—namely Tikva Frymer-Kensky from the University of Chicago, David Novak from the University of Toronto, Peter Ochs from the University of Virginia, and Michael Signer from the University of Notre Dame—then signed by a large number of Jewish scholars. Before entering the main corpus of the text, the authors state: “We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity. As a first step, we offer eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another.”³⁶ The text therefore makes clear statements about historical, theological, and practical points, but it does not strictly insist on the need nor offer advice on how to actualize those points in everyday life and relations, although it is clear that these statements should and will have an impact on Jewish-Christian relations from the grassroots to the upper levels of denominations and organizations.

A call to action explicitly arrives only at the last point on joint work for justice and peace: “our joint efforts, together with those of other faith communities, will help bring the kingdom of God for which we hope and long. Separately and together, we must work to bring justice and peace to our world.”³⁷ Under the paragraph dealing with the connection between Nazism and Christianity that is rejected as automatic, there is another invitation to action directed only to Christians: “we encourage the continuation of recent efforts in Christian theology to repudiate unequivocally contempt of Judaism and the Jewish people.”³⁸

In 2004, Danny Burkeman published an insightful article entitled “Why Are There So Few Jewish Statements on Christianity or Jewish-Christian Relations?” He notices how “[i]mplicit within the title of this article lies an assumption that during this period there could or should have been more Jewish statements on Christianity or Jewish-Christian relations.”³⁹ This is actually a question that needs to be raised and that justifies the reason why I start discussing Jewish statements only after the year 2000, that is, thirty-five years after *Nostra Aetate*.

Some reasons, Burkeman affirms, are related to the historical situation: because of the history of Christian power, they had to be the ones initiating this new process; and because Nazism originated in Christian Europe Christians felt the need to reflect on it. “This need for reflection is very different for Jews, who, as the primary victims of the Holocaust, emerged with their greatest imperative being to survive. The place of the Holocaust in the issuing of statements necessarily means that Christian statements would need to be articulated before Jews respond,”⁴⁰ states Burkeman. He also notices how some practical aspects have to be taken into consideration: the absence of equivalent infrastructures in the Jewish world for issuing statements that might be

³⁶ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, and Michael Signer, “Dabru Emet, A Jewish statement on Christians and Christianity,” *The New York Times*, New England edition (10 September 2000), 23.

³⁷ Frymer-Kensky et al., “Dabru Emet.”

³⁸ Frymer-Kensky et al., “Dabru Emet.”

³⁹ Danny Burkeman, “Why Are There So Few Jewish Statements on Christianity or Jewish-Christian Relations?” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 111.

⁴⁰ Burkeman, “Why Are There So Few Jewish Statements,” 113.

recognized as authoritative for world Judaism,⁴¹ and the expected structure itself of statements, which belongs more to the Christian tradition than the Jewish one.⁴² All that explains not only the smaller number of documents issued from the Jewish side but also the fact that Jewish contributions are not giving the same focus to implementation actions as the Catholic ones progressively began to do. This could be attributed to the different organization, history, and religious thought peculiar to Judaism.

That said, more attention to action is paid in later documents. In 2015, on the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, another Jewish statement was issued. This time it came from an international group of Orthodox Rabbis, and was entitled *To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians*. Seen by many as an anniversary response to *Nostra Aetate*, this is the first official statement coming from the Jewish Orthodox world after the change in direction in Jewish-Catholic relations mandated by the Second Vatican Council. As the title itself shows, this unprecedented document focuses on concrete actions brought forward by both Jews and Christians together, and adds a theological statement affirming that these actions are a way to do the will of our common Father.

The focus shifted from the action of speaking suggested by the title of *Dabru Emet* to doing something in *To Do the Will of our Father in Heaven*. Although no precise example is given on how to implement Jews’ and Christians’ “common covenantal mission to perfect the world under the sovereignty of the Almighty,”⁴³ the document concludes as follows: “In imitating G-d, Jews and Christians must offer models of service, unconditional love and holiness. We are all created in G-d’s Holy Image, and Jews and Christians will remain dedicated to the Covenant by playing an active role together in redeeming the world.”⁴⁴

In 2017 another document was published from the Jewish side of the dialogue: *Between Jerusalem and Rome: Reflections on 50 Years of Nostra Aetate*. This time it was not signed by individual religious leaders but by organizations,⁴⁵ namely the Conference of European Rabbis (CER), the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America (RAC).

The first part of the document is an acknowledgment of what *Nostra Aetate* actually accomplished and how “the transformations in the Church’s attitudes and teachings are not only sincere but also increasingly profound, and that we are entering an era of growing tolerance,

⁴¹ Burkeman, “Why Are There So Few Jewish Statements,” 114.

⁴² Burkeman, “Why Are There So Few Jewish Statements,” 121.

⁴³ Jehoshua Ahrens et al. “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven: Toward a Partnership between Jews and Christians,” December 3, 2015, §4, <http://cjcuc.org/2015/12/03/orthodox-rabbinic-statement-on-christianity>.

⁴⁴ Ahrens et al., “To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven,” §7.

⁴⁵ Rabbi Arie Folger, Chairman of the ad hoc *Nostra Aetate* response committee, stated that “close to fifty years after the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, the Standing Committee of the Conference of European Rabbis, as it met in Athens in November 2015 for its semiannual meeting, explored, debated and finally decided that we ought to recognize, not as individuals, but as religious representatives of the traditional, Orthodox Jewish Community, the significance and success of *Nostra Aetate* No. 4.” Arie Folger, “How and Why this Declaration Came About”, in *Between Jerusalem and Rome: Reflections on 50 Years of Nostra Aetate. Full version*, ed. Conference of European Rabbis (CER), the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America (RAC), August 31 2017, §19, accessed at: https://www.cjr.us/images/From_Jerusalem_to_Rome.pdf.

mutual respect, and solidarity between members of our respective faiths.”⁴⁶ Initiatives like the establishment of a bilateral committee of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel with the Vatican are mentioned while making clear that these steps do not imply the disappearance of essential theological differences.

Once this premise is clearly affirmed, a strong statement opens the last part of the document: “We Jews view Catholics as our partners, close allies, friends and brothers in our mutual quest for a better world blessed with peace, social justice and security.”⁴⁷ Similarly to what we read in *To Do the Will of Our Father in Heaven*, the invitation to common action is vocal and clear. Here a special mention is made of the question of assuring religious freedom. The very last paragraph integrates “mutual understanding” as a result of dialogue besides the biblical recommended actions to improve the world that Jews and Christians are called to do together: “to go in God's ways, feed the hungry and dress the naked, give joy to widows and orphans, provide refuge to the persecuted and the oppressed.”⁴⁸

In these three documents a positive theological understanding of the other and God's relation with him/her, as well as the concrete engagement in bettering the world we live in, are key elements of reflection. These are definitely needed premises (the first) and expected outcomes (the second). As we already saw in the Catholic documents, an explicit statement about the theological positioning about the other and his/her faith is a fundamental step and calls for possible partnerships and cooperation. What is not found in these statements is a reflection on the possible necessity to work through education in local communities about the religious other. Mentioning “mutual understanding” in *Between Jerusalem and Rome* might suggest that a way to support such endeavors is through an educative effort but, even so, how would it be carried out and how would this “mutual understanding” be assured?

One proposal comes from a longstanding Catholic expert on Jewish-Catholic dialogue. While reporting about a gathering he attended with other Catholic theologians on “Christ and the Jewish people,” where three Jewish consultants were also invited, Phillip Cunningham gives more or less explicitly advice to “Jewish theologians” who could have to reflect on Christianity, stressing the need in dialogue to hear from one's own counterpart how he/she sees himself/herself:

Their role [of the three Jewish consultants] was not to adjudicate whether or not various Christian theological ideas were "kosher" from a Jewish point of view, but rather to be alert to any distortions or inaccuracies being made about Judaism and to supplement the conversations with insights from the Jewish tradition. I could imagine a reverse situation of Jewish thinkers developing a "Jewish theology" of the particularity of Christianity in which Christian theologians would be alert to distortions or inaccuracies about Christianity that might arise.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Conference of European Rabbis (CER), the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America (RAC), *Between Jerusalem and Rome*, Evaluation and Reevaluation.

⁴⁷ Conference of European Rabbis (CER), the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America (RAC), *Between Jerusalem and Rome*, Therefore we declare.

⁴⁸ Conference of European Rabbis (CER), the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and the Rabbinical Council of America (RAC), *Between Jerusalem and Rome*, Therefore we declare.

⁴⁹ Philip Cunningham, "No Religion Is an Island": Catholic and Jewish Theologies of Each Other," *Modern Judaism* 29, no. 1: 32.

At the level of practical initiatives to favor dialogue, during the past decades many arose in Jewish contexts in various countries. For example, in Jerusalem the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue, founded by the late Daniel Rossing offers a wide range of projects fostering mutual knowledge between Jews, Christians, and Muslims and working through education in schools, spirituality and even tourism. In the United States the Tanenbaum Center, founded by Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, took to heart the mission of working for a better world by means of combating prejudice and fostering dialogue and implemented a number of projects, including, for example, an initiative against school bullying, teaching about religio-cultural competency to medical students, or the establishment of the Peacemakers in Action Network. The Russell Berrie Foundation, in partnership with the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, established the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. The Center offers fellowships to students from all around the world who come to Rome to study interreligious dialogue with a particular focus on Jewish-Catholic relations.

Common Word and Common Actions: Statements from and with Muslim partners in Dialogue with Christians

In the first part of this article I primarily focused on *Nostra Aetate* §4. However, we should not forget that the Council Declaration does not discuss only the relation of the Catholic Church with Jews. Believers of other specific religions are mentioned too. Regarding Muslims it says that “the Church regards with esteem also the Moslems,”⁵⁰ and then continues by mentioning some theological points Muslims share with Christians, such as adoring one God, revering Jesus and honoring Mary, awaiting the day of judgment, and valuing moral life. Finally the document comments: “Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Moslems, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.”⁵¹ It is a shorter discussion than the one on Judaism, but of great importance, and derives from what was already written about Muslims and their faith in another Council document, the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*.⁵² Unlike with the language used to talk about Judaism, here the text “is couched in a language that is comprehensible not only to Christians but also to Muslims.”⁵³ This might be due to the more extensive and long experience of the Church in many Muslim-majority countries of the world where the Church had to find ways of presenting herself to Muslims. This difference points, then, to how tackling relationships with Jews and with Muslims is quite different because of history and theological ground as well as social and political situations.

In 1974 an Office for Islam was opened at the Secretariat for Non-Christians (now Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) and a Commission for Religious Relations with Muslims was established. Since then many initiatives of dialogue with Muslim leaders have targeted different religious and national Muslim communities. For example, a longstanding relationship was established with Al-Azhar University in Egypt (dating back to the 1970s), the Royal Academy

⁵⁰ Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate* §3.

⁵¹ Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate* §3.

⁵² Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium* §16.

⁵³ Joseph Ellul, “The Issue of Muslim-Christian Dialogue: ‘Nostra Aetate’ Revisited,” *Angelicum* 84, no. 2 (2007): 364.

of Jordan (from the 1980s) as well as the Da'wa Center in Lybia (from the end of the 1980s) and Doha University (from 2003).⁵⁴

During these years two documents on dialogue were issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (*Dialogue and Mission* in 1984 and *Dialogue and Proclamation* in 1991). Although these share both theological points and practical insights about dialogue with Muslims as well, it is not the relationship with Islam and Muslims that is the topic of analysis, but rather dialogue with non-Christian religions in a broader sense. Although it is not a document, an unforgettable speech held by Pope John Paul II should also be mentioned here. In 1985 the Pope met with a crowd of young Muslims in Casablanca. In his address he recalled *Nostra Aetate*, and mentioned the many things Christians and Muslims have in common while not hiding differences. He called his audience to work together in harmony and concluded by saying: "I believe that, today, God invites us to *change our old practices*. We must respect each other, and also we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God."⁵⁵ The structure of the text inherits decades of dialogue tradition and combines the presentation of what we can recognize and somehow share with the other, what makes us differ and has to be respected and finally, the call to action.

On September 12, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI gave a lecture on Faith and Reason at the University of Regensburg that sparked heated criticism when he quoted a Byzantine emperor, Manuel II Paleologus, whose words about Islam were considered offensive.⁵⁶ This talk resulted in a quite general cooling down of relationships between Catholic and Muslim authorities. After one month, a group of thirty-eight Islamic authorities and scholars representing different schools of thoughts prepared a response for the Pope. They tackled some key issues, such as God's transcendence; the question of forced conversion; "jihad" and "holy war"; and the relationship between Christianity and Islam. This final point became the starting point of *A Common Word between Us and You*, a letter that was signed by one hundred thirty-eight Muslim leaders in 2007 and addressed to Pope Benedict XVI as well as all other Christian leaders of different Churches.

Differently from *Nostra Aetate* and subsequent documents issued by the Vatican, which primarily addressed Christians and invited a change of attitude with regards to their relation with their non-Christian brothers and sisters, *A Common Word*, due to the situation engendering its redaction, is a Muslim document addressing Christians, not Muslims. This is arguably the reason why such a larger space is consecrated to describing Islamic approaches and theology, above all regarding the love of God and to a lesser extent the love of neighbor, which are considered the two greatest commandments that Islam and Christianity share, as the letter states: "Finally, as Muslims, and in obedience to the Holy Qur'an, we ask Christians to come together with us on the common essentials of our two religions... *that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto*

⁵⁴ A long and complete list of these high-level initiatives of dialogue involving the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and different Muslim organizations is available in Maurice Borrmans, *Orientamenti per un dialogo tra cristiani e musulmani* (Roma: Urbaniana University Press, 2015), 181–205.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Address to Young Muslims*, Morocco, August 19, 1985, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1985/august/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19850819_giovani-stadio-casablanca.html n°10.

⁵⁶ One of the most debated sentences was: "Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached" (Benedict XVI, *Lecture at the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg*, September 12, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html).

Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God... (Aal ‘Imran, 3:64).⁵⁷ The language used aims at favoring understanding by the Christian reader; the themes are a self-presentation and the rare calls to action are mostly directed to Christians, not to Muslims.

Although the tone of the whole letter is rather imbued with a theological reading and interpretation of Scriptures, the final paragraph moves us to the level of social and everyday life: “So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill.”⁵⁸ This invitation, addressed to both Christians and Muslims, is rephrasing the famous verse of Sura al-Ma’ida (Q5:48) but gives no practical indication on how to concretely do what the verse is recommending. Bradley Shingleton highlights that by aiming at identifying theological common ground and containing no explicit invitation to ongoing dialogue, “perhaps the authors of the letter assume that the shared scriptural and theological understandings described in it establish the agenda for future dialogue.”⁵⁹ The lack of a systematic plan of dialogue implementation reflects the nature of this text and its main goal: an invitation to Christians to better know Muslims and recognize how much they have in common. Even if the letter in itself does not pay much attention to further steps, it sparked many reactions and opened the way to follow-ups. On the website that was created to share the document and host responses to it, www.acommonword.com, there is a page dedicated to educational programs that were inspired by the letter⁶⁰ as well as reading lists compiled by Muslim and Christian scholars to offer sound resources to those who want to learn more about the other faith.⁶¹

Now-Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald (then archbishop) published an article in 2015 on *Islamochristiana*, the magazine issued by the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, on the developments of the previous decade (2005–15) in relation with the topics discussed in *Nostra Aetate*. Starting with John Paul II’s activity, he mentions “how the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* influences the activities of the Pope,”⁶² while making reference to his encounters with Muslim communities during his pastoral visits.⁶³ He goes to mention the *Nostra Aetate Fellowship* that continues to be offered through the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue every year to non-Christian students coming to Rome to deepen their knowledge of Christianity. This is a way to work on education while being immersed in another culture and fostering mutual knowledge. Many other initiatives are enumerated but it is worth mentioning the ones initiated by Muslims or Islamic organizations to show how, although there have been no clear statements about implementation of dialogue, the decades of encounter and the theological effort to declare the importance of joint action for the common good as will of God has had an impact.

⁵⁷ “A Common Word Between Us and You,” October 13, 2007, <https://www.acommonword.com/the-acw-document/>, III.

⁵⁸ “A Common Word,” III.

⁵⁹ Bradley Shingleton, “A Common Word: What Comes Next and How?,” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* (Winter 2008): 66.

⁶⁰ <https://www.acommonword.com/educational-programs/>.

⁶¹ <https://www.acommonword.com/recommended-reading-lists-by-muslim-and-christian-scholars/>.

⁶² Michael L. Fitzgerald, “The Relevance of *Nostra Aetate* in Changed Times. Developments in the Last Decade,” *Islamochristiana* 41 (2015): 38.

⁶³ Fitzgerald mentioned Pope Francis’ visit to the Central African Republic, cfr. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151130_repubblica-centrafricana-musulmani.html.

In Egypt, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Al-Tayyeb, initiated the *Bayt al-‘Aila* program, which gathered “religious leaders of all denominations to find a common answer to sectarian violence”⁶⁴ as well as seminars for imams and priests. Local initiatives as such involve only the religious leadership but are vital to allow communities to get along together and get the feeling that they are tackling important issues together. If the leaders have this feeling, they will be able to convey it to their congregations too. Another initiative that Cardinal Fitzgerald describes as “the most prominent initiative in the Islamic world in recent years”⁶⁵ is the foundation of the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) in Vienna in 2012. This Centre works at various levels to foster dialogue internationally through activities from the religious hierarchy to the grassroots, passing through academia and specific issues such as migration and peacemaking efforts. Furthermore, a number of Christian-Muslim committees and forums are active; among them the Catholic-Muslim Forum took the responsibility of carrying forward the reflection started by *A Common Word*.⁶⁶

Discussions with the famous university of Al-Azhar resumed after a period of pause and the personal relationship that Pope Francis and the Grand Imam al-Tayyeb established led to the second document that I want to discuss here, the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together. The two religious leaders signed it together on February 4, 2019, addressing it to all Muslims of the East and the West and all Catholics of the East and the West.⁶⁷ After the introduction, the document starts with the “basmala,” the typical Islamic expression “in the name of God” with which almost all Suras of the Qur’an start, adapted then as “in the name of” and repeated multiple times introducing either a disadvantaged class of people (“the poor, the destitute, the marginalized,” “orphans, widows, refugees and those exiled”) or a divine gift (human fraternity, freedom, justice and mercy).

The reflection the two signatories offer stems from “a profound consideration of our contemporary reality”⁶⁸ that they analyze. A list of twelve bullet points follows: the first few offer clarifications about terms used in the document, such as freedom, justice and dialogue, but what is more interesting for our discussion are the remaining bullet points demanding concrete action, such as the protection of places of worship, support for the concept of full citizenship for all without discrimination, good relations between East and West, and the protection of the rights of women, children, the elderly, the weak, and the disabled. Pope Francis and the Grand Imam al-Tayyeb conclude by expressing their hope that the words of their joint document will not remain on paper alone. They entreat that “these principles be translated into policies, decisions, legislative texts, courses of study and materials to be circulated.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, “The Relevance of Nostra Aetate in Changed Times,” 43.

⁶⁵ Fitzgerald, “The Relevance of Nostra Aetate in Changed Times,” 43.

⁶⁶ “Final Declaration of the 4th Catholic-Muslim Forum (8 November 2017, Berkeley, USA), 10.11.2017,” <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/11/10/171110c.html>.

⁶⁷ There have been numerous comments on the question of representativeness and authority of the two leaders, since worldwide Islam, unlike Catholicism, does not formally recognize a common representative authority.

⁶⁸ Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayyeb, “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” February 4, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html.

⁶⁹ Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayyeb, “Document on Human Fraternity.”

Felix Körner, a Catholic theologian and an expert in Islam, describes this last part of the document as follows: “Their [Pope Francis and Grand Imam al-Tayyeb’s] promise is that they will commit to spreading the Declaration and its content; their request is that the document be included in the curricula of education; and their hope is that the declaration is received correctly, namely as an invitation to reconciliation, a call to every conscience, a testimony of faith in God, and finally a gesture of loving closeness....”⁷⁰

Following the release of this document, religious leaders as well as academicians expressed their opinions about it. A group of Muslim scholars and religious leaders produced a commentary on the document, *Fraternity for Knowledge and Cooperation*, in which they confirm their support to the statement and praise that “the form of dialogue that it proposes is not that of good intentions, but rather the dialogue of faith in God.”⁷¹ At the same time, the signatories do not want to keep dialogue at a metaphysical level. As they clearly say, “the path to be walked together is that of ‘justice based on mercy.’”⁷² They offer some warnings about the way the concept of fraternity might be interpreted and, interestingly, the more practical comment they make towards the end of this text is related to concrete actions to foster internal dialogue within the Islamic community so that “unity in diversity” could be achieved and “practices such as excommunicatory violence (takfirism) are brought to an end.”⁷³

Also, a new committee was established a few months later to promote the ideals contained in the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.” The first meeting of the new committee, established in August, took place in the Vatican, at Casa Santa Marta, on September 11, 2019. About a week later, Cardinal Miguel Ayuso Guixot, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said in an interview that the new committee would “encourage the communities [...] so that they commit themselves to read, comment and promote interreligious dialogue through the contents of that Declaration.”⁷⁴

The interesting experience of a co-signed document by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Al-Tayyeb introduces us to a different kind of text where believers of both communities are addressed at the same time. This demands a new kind of language that could sound familiar to both communities (as, for example, in the formula of introduction). Furthermore, after decades (and centuries) of dialogue, the goal is no longer to present the other one’s own faith nor to elaborate a specific theology of religious diversity since two different communities are addressed. It is rather a very detailed joint call for action that occupies the core of the document. This approach will make easier to have assessment criteria of implementation and it definitely expands the spectrum of actions that can be labeled under the “dialogue” tag. Furthermore, the signing of the document was a historical moment: pictures of that event were on all media and marked the beginning of a new phase in relationships, as happened with John Paul II pictures at the synagogue in Rome or at the Western Wall. Images too play their role in dialogue.

⁷⁰ Felix Körner, “Fratellanza Umana: Una Riflessione sul Documento di Abu Dhabi,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, no 4054 (2019), 321. Translation by the author.

⁷¹ “Fraternity for Knowledge and Cooperation,” 2019, <https://www.christians-muslims.com/document>.

⁷² “Fraternity for Knowledge and Cooperation.”

⁷³ “Fraternity for Knowledge and Cooperation.”

⁷⁴ Deborah Castellano Lubov and Rosa Die Alcolea, “Cardinal Guixot Discusses Fruits of Pope and Grand Imam’s Abu Dhabi Document on Human Fraternity,” *Zenit*, September 19, 2019, <https://zenit.org/articles/interview-cardinal-guixot-discusses-fruits-of-pope-grand-imams-abu-dhabi-document-on-human-fraternity/>.

Conclusion

In recent decades religious leaders and communities have increasingly reflected on relations with people from other religious communities. This paper focused on the perspective of the Catholic Church and her Jewish and Muslim partners in dialogue. We considered therefore some documents issued by the Vatican, beginning with the Council declaration *Nostra Aetate* and moving forward to the year 2000; statements by some Jewish leaders; some letters addressed to Christian leaders by groups of Muslims; and the recently co-signed document by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.

As we have seen, these texts might be very different because of the people they address, the historical moment when they are conceived, and their goal. Some documents are mostly concerned with theological statements that, once interiorized, could open the way to a more sincere and open dialogue with the religious other. Some other statements invite readers more bluntly to practical joint actions with people of the other faith tradition, and this overview shows that this is increasingly happening with later documents. The texts discussed show that first steps in dialogue documents mostly tend to stress the theological approach and the way the institution publishing it looks at the other and at the relationship that could or should be established. Only later more attention is paid to actions strengthening dialogue and reaching out to larger groups. In that field, it appears that while Catholic documents emphasize the need for education, Jewish and Muslim counterparts tend to insist more on joint social actions.

Even when implementation of the document is not explicitly called for, I would argue that such statements cannot be detached from their practical aspect. Theology is necessary to sustain change of views of the religious other: if I think that all people who do not belong to my faith community are doomed to Hell, then my attitude towards them will reflect that. Once there are strong theological statements advocating for a different view, dialogue becomes not only the means to survive in society but a chance to discover another believer. Theology is therefore an important first step that should be followed by the multiple levels of implementation that we touched upon in this article: academic efforts, meeting of religious leaders, diplomatic action, catechism and education of youth, common actions for justice and peace. These are all fruits of dialogue.

Statements are not the only heart of dialogue but they allow it to survive, leaving the door open to people's necessary creativity in establishing relationships.

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