

Response by Rabbi Dr. David Bollag

to the Speech of Cardinal Kurt Koch (A summary)

Dear Rabbi Piron, Your Eminence Cardinal Koch, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Rabbi Piron, for your introduction. I am very happy to be here with you, Cardinal Koch. I am not completely sure, but I suppose that I have been invited to respond to your interesting speech, because you and I have a lot in common. We grew up in the same country (Switzerland), we speak the same language, I teach in the university (of Lucerne) where you have been a student and a professor, and I am a member of the Jewish-Christian Dialogue-Group in Switzerland of which you used to be the president. I will therefore allow myself to say a few words in Swiss to you.

...

We have made a lot of progress since Nostra Aetate. Full diplomatic relations have been established between the State of Israel and the Vatican, the previous and the present Pope have visited Israel, there are regular meetings between the Vatican and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and I see your visit as the President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews here in Jerusalem as part of this progress.

The main component of the progress, however, is the dialogue itself, both on the international and on the national level. The dialogue gives us the possibility to speak with and listen to each other, to exchange opinions, in order to constantly improve Jewish-Christian relations. The purpose of the dialogue is not to find out who is right or who is wrong, but to hear the other side. To be able to let the other side know how he experiences the other. I can let you know what bothers me and you can let me know what bothers you.

In this way I would like to respond to your speech. I can accept your statement that Hitler himself hated Christianity as much as he hated Judaism. Yet, in my eyes this does not mean that there is no connection between Christianity and Nazism. If not for the long history of Christian Anti-Judaism in Western Europe, Nazi-Germany would not have been able to persecute the Jews and kill millions of them. I would even go a step further. Without the Catholic Church realizing this connection, Nostra Aetate would not have been born. After the war, 1947 in Seelisberg, the Catholic Church admitted to the connection between its own Anti-Judaism and the mass-killing of the Jews, and came to the conclusion that something had to be changed. (The Vatican's Document called "We Remember - A Reflection on the Shoah", too, is a direct and clear result of this.)

In the very same way I'd like to mention another point which troubles us Jews at the moment. I want you to hear the Jewish side to it. While, as I mentioned, we have made a lot of progress with and since Nostra Aetate, we have lately also seen some

regression. The re-introduction of the old Latin Mass in the Good Friday Prayer for Jews is very problematic and painful for us. I admit, we are sensitive, maybe even overly-sensitive, but we are traumatized, and everyone who is traumatized is overly-sensitive. Even little incidents immediately raise his fears.

In 1970, as a direct result of *Nostra Aetate*, the prayer was changed and read:

“Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant.”

Yet in 2008 the old, so called “Tridentine Liturgy” was reintroduced:

“Let us pray for the Jews: That our God and Lord may illuminate their hearts, that they acknowledge Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men.”

This formulation is - for us - a strong regression. It reminds us of past and very painful times, when the Catholic Church was openly and forcefully working to convert Jews to Christianity. - I am mentioning this here so that you can hear it from me. As a Jew, I have no right and no intention to tell you that or even how the Catholic Church should change this prayer. Yet, I see it as an important and integral part of the Jewish-Christian dialogue to raise this issue and I therefore take this opportunity to speak to you about it.

Nevertheless, Cardinal Koch, I am fully aware and I greatly appreciate that we have made a lot of progress during the last 65 years and I am convinced we will continue to do so. I am very happy you came to Jerusalem and thank you for your visit. The Jewish-Christian dialogue will proceed and we will work together to improve Jewish-Catholic Relations.

Thank you.