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Audience with a delegation from the Conference of European Rabbis

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a delegation from the Conference of European Rabbis.

The following is the text of the address prepared by the Pope for the occasion, handed to those present:

Address prepared by the Holy Father

Dear Brothers,

I greet you and I offer you a cordial welcome. Thank you for your visit, which I appreciate. In the past, I had occasion to meet here in the Vatican with your organization, the voice of the Rabbis in Europe. I am happy that we have been able to strengthen our relationship over time, particularly in recent years.

My first thought and prayer goes, above all else, to everything that has happened in the last few weeks. Yet again violence and war have erupted in that Land blessed by the Most High, which seems continually assailed by the vileness of hatred and the deadly clash of weapons. The spread of anti-Semitic demonstrations, which I strongly condemn, is also of great concern.

Dear brothers, in the darkness of conflict, we who are believers in the one God, look to him whom the prophet Isaiah calls “the judge between the nations and the arbiter for many peoples”. He adds, almost as a consequence of his judgment, a marvelous prophecy of peace: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (*Is* 2:4). In this time in which we are witnessing violence and destruction, we believers are called to build fraternity and open paths of reconciliation for all and before all, in the name of the Almighty who, as another prophet says, has “plans for welfare and not for evil” (*Jer* 29:11). Not weapons, not terrorism, not war, but compassion, justice and dialogue are the fitting means for building peace.

I would like to reflect on the art of dialogue. Human beings, who have a social nature and who live in contact with others, find their fulfillment in the weaving of social relationships. In this sense, humanity is not only capable of dialogue, but is dialogue itself. Poised between heaven and earth, it is only in dialogue with the transcendent One and with our brothers and sisters who accompany us that we can understand and mature. The word “dialogue” etymologically means “through the word”. The Word of the Most High is the light that illumines the paths of life (cf. *Ps* 119:105): it directs our own steps to the search for our neighbour, to acceptance and to patience; certainly not to the brusque passion of vengeance and the folly of bitter hatred. How important it is, therefore, for us believers to be witnesses of dialogue!

If we apply these observations to the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue, we can say that we draw near to each other through encounter, listening and fraternal exchange, acknowledging ourselves to be servants and disciples of that divine Word, the living channel from which our words spring forth. In this way, in order to become builders of peace, we are called to be builders of dialogue, not only with our own strengths and abilities, but with the help of the Almighty. Indeed, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain” (*Ps*.127:1).

The dialogue with Judaism is particularly important for us Christians, because we have Jewish roots. Jesus was born and lived as a Jew; he himself is the first guarantor of the Jewish heritage at the centre of Christianity and we who are Christians need you, dear brothers. We need Judaism to understand ourselves better. It is therefore important that Jewish Christian dialogue should keep its theological dimension alive, while continuing to face social, cultural and political questions.

Our religious traditions are tightly interwoven: we are not two alien creeds, developed independently in separate times and places, having no influence on one another. During his visit to the Synagogue of Rome, Pope John Paul II observed that the Jewish religion is not extrinsic, “but in a certain way, it is ‘intrinsic’ to our religion”. He called you “our beloved brothers”, “our older brothers” (*Address*, 13 April 1986). Therefore one could say that ours is more than an interreligious dialogue. It is a *family* dialogue. When I went to the Synagogue of Rome, I said that “We all belong to a single family, the family of God, who accompanies us and protects us as his people” (*Address*, 17 January 2016).

Dear brothers, we are linked to each other before the one God; together we are called to bear witness to his word with our dialogue and to his peace with our actions. May the Lord of history and life grant us the courage and the patience to do so. *Shalom!*
