

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE HOLY LAND
(8-15 MAY 2009)

**COURTESY VISIT
TO THE TWO CHIEF RABBIS OF JERUSALEM**

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Hechal Shlomo Centre - Jerusalem
Tuesday, 12 May 2009*

*Distinguished Rabbis,
Dear Friends,*

I am grateful for the invitation to visit Heichal Shlomo and to meet with you during this trip of mine to the Holy Land as Bishop of Rome. I thank Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar and Ashkenazi Rabbi Yona Metzger for their warm words of welcome and the desire they have expressed to continue strengthening the bonds of friendship which the Catholic Church and the Chief Rabbinate have labored so diligently to forge over the past decades. Your visits to the Vatican in 2003 and [2005](#) are a sign of the good will which characterizes our developing relations.

Distinguished Rabbis, I reciprocate by expressing my own respect and esteem for you and your communities. I assure you of my desire to deepen mutual understanding and cooperation between the Holy See, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and Jewish people throughout the world.

A great source of satisfaction for me since the beginning of my pontificate has been the fruit yielded by the ongoing dialogue between the Delegation of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Delegation for Relations with the Catholic Church. I wish to thank the members of both delegations for their dedication and hard work in implementing this initiative, so earnestly desired by my esteemed predecessor Pope John Paul II, as he said during the Great Jubilee Year of 2000.

Our encounter today is a most fitting occasion to give thanks to the Almighty for the many blessings which have accompanied the dialogue conducted by the Bilateral Commission, and to look forward with expectation to its future sessions. The willingness of the delegates to discuss openly and patiently not only points of agreement, but also points of difference, has already paved the way to more effective collaboration in public life. Jews and Christians alike are concerned to ensure respect for the sacredness of human life, the centrality of the family, a sound education for the young, and the freedom of religion and conscience for a healthy society. These themes of dialogue represent only the initial phases of what we trust will be a steady, progressive journey towards an enhanced mutual understanding.

An indication of the potential of this series of meetings is readily seen in our shared concern in the face of moral relativism and the offences it spawns against the dignity

of the human person. In approaching the most urgent ethical questions of our day, our two communities are challenged to engage people of good will at the level of reason, while simultaneously pointing to the religious foundations which best sustain lasting moral values. May the dialogue that has begun continue to generate ideas on how Christians and Jews can work together to heighten society's appreciation of the distinctive contribution of our religious and ethical traditions. Here in Israel, given that Christians constitute only a small portion of the total population, they particularly value opportunities for dialogue with their Jewish neighbors.

Trust is undeniably an essential element of effective dialogue. Today I have the opportunity to repeat that the Catholic Church is irrevocably committed to the path chosen at the [Second Vatican Council](#) for a genuine and lasting reconciliation between Christians and Jews. As the Declaration [Nostra Aetate](#) makes clear, the Church continues to value the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews and desires an ever deeper mutual understanding and respect through biblical and theological studies as well as fraternal dialogues. May the seven Bilateral Commission meetings which have already taken place between the Holy See and the Chief Rabbinate stand as evidence! I am thus grateful for your reciprocal assurance that the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Chief Rabbinate will continue to grow in respect and understanding in the future.

My friends, I express again my deep appreciation for the welcome you have extended to me today. I am confident that our friendship will continue to set an example of trust in dialogue for Jews and Christians throughout the world. Looking at the accomplishments achieved thus far, and drawing our inspiration from the Holy Scriptures, we can confidently look forward to even stronger cooperation between our communities – together with all people of good will – in decrying hatred and oppression throughout the world. I pray that God, who searches our hearts and knows our thoughts (Ps 139:23), will continue to enlighten us with his wisdom, so that we may follow his commandments to love him with all our heart, soul and strength (cf. Dt 6:5), and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lev 19:18). Thank you.