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Pope Calls for Healing With Jews

Recalls Church's Plea for Forgiveness

ROME, JAN. 17, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The Church has begged forgiveness for the failings of Catholics that contributed to the "scourge of anti-Semitism," and Benedict XVI is expressing his hope that "these wounds be healed forever." The Pope made this plea today when he became the second Pontiff to visit the Synagogue of Rome. Pope John Paul II was the first, in 1986.

Today's event marked the third time that Benedict XVI as Pontiff has visited a synagogue, after visits in Cologne and New York.

His speech reflected on the common spiritual patrimony of Jews and Christians, and affirmed the efforts of the Apostolic See to save Jews during World War II.

The Holy Father noted how the Second Vatican Council "has represented for Catholics a clear landmark to which constant reference is made in our attitude and our relations with the Jewish people, marking a new and significant stage." He said the council gave "a strong impetus" to what he called an "irrevocable commitment to pursue the path of dialogue, fraternity and friendship."

Forty years have brought deepening and development to that journey, Benedict XVI affirmed, including "important steps and significant gestures."

After mentioning strides made under the pontificate of John Paul II, he affirmed: "I too, in the course of my pontificate, have wanted to demonstrate my closeness to and my affection for the people of the Covenant."

He continued: "Furthermore, the Church has not failed to deplore the failings of her sons and daughters, begging forgiveness for all that could in any way have contributed to the scourge of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism. May these wounds be healed forever!

"The heartfelt prayer which Pope John Paul II offered at the Western Wall on March 26, 2000, comes back to my mind, and it calls forth a profound echo in our hearts: 'God of our Fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the nations: We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.'"

Fraternity

Benedict XVI went on to recall the atrocities of the Nazi regime, noting how the program of the Third Reich "reached as far as Rome" in 1943 when more than 1,000 Roman Jews were rounded up and deported to Auschwitz.

"The memory of these events compels us to strengthen the bonds that unite us so that our mutual understanding, respect and acceptance may always increase," he said.

The Holy Father continued by giving a reflection on the bonds of union between Judaism and Christianity.

He explained: "Our closeness and spiritual fraternity find in the Holy Bible [...] their most stable and lasting foundation, which constantly reminds us of our common roots, our history and the rich spiritual patrimony that we share. It is in pondering her own mystery that the Church, the People of God of the New Covenant, discovers her own profound bond with the Jews, who were chosen by the Lord before all others to receive his word.

"The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God's revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews "belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs and of their race, according to the flesh is the Christ" (Rom 9:4-5), "for the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!" (Rom 11:29)."

Benedict XVI said there are many lessons that can be learned from "our common heritage."

He recalled three: "First of all, the solidarity which binds the Church to the Jewish people 'at the level of their spiritual identity,' which offers Christians the opportunity to promote 'a renewed respect for the Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament'; the centrality of the Decalogue as a common ethical message of permanent value for Israel, for the Church, for non-believers and for all of humanity; the task of preparing or ushering in the Kingdom of the Most High in the 'care for creation' entrusted by God to man for him to cultivate and to care for responsibly."

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