

ZE10101315 - 2010-10-13

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-30646?l=english>

## **RABBI NOTES PROGRESS IN JEWISH-CHURCH RELATIONS**

### **Says Both Sides Share Many Interests, Values**

VATICAN CITY, OCT. 13, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- When Catholics and Jews get to know each other, they tend to see each other as genuine friends who have many of the same values and interests in common, affirms Rabbi David Rosen.

The Rabbi said this today at the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops where he was invited as a special guest. The two-week assembly seeks to address several challenges faced by the Churches in the region.

In addition to Rosen, who is the advisor to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and director of the Department for Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, the synod also invited two representatives of Islam: Mohammed Al-Sammak, political adviser to the mufti of Lebanon, and Ayatollah Seyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Ahmadabadi, professor at the Faculty of Law at the Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran and Member of the Iranian Academy of Sciences.

"The relationship today between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people is a blessed transformation in our times -- arguably without historic parallel," said Rosen. He added that "this striking transformation" is not complete, as more time is needed to overcome the "contempt" toward Jews that had been spread for centuries.

However, improvement in relations has taken root, and Rosen was quick to note that there are some countries where Catholic-Jewish relations have progressed more than in others.

In the United States, he explained, "Jews and Christians live in an open society side by side as vibrant self-confident and civically engaged minorities. As a result the relationship has advanced there to a unique degree involving cooperation and exchanges between the

communities and their educational institutions; and today the US boasts literally dozens of academic institutions for Catholic-Jewish studies and relations, while there are perhaps three in the rest of the world.

"Indeed, there is a widespread perception among the Jewish communities in the United States of the Catholic Church as a genuine friend with profound values and interests in common."

The rabbi lamented, however, that in other countries, and especially those that are mostly Catholic, there is not only a lack of interest in Judaism, but there is ignorance -- by even priests and other clergy -- of "Nostra Aetate," which is the fundamental document of the Second Vatican Council on relations with other religions, and other current Church documents on the topic.

Rosen also acknowledged that in Israel, "the only polity in the world where Jews are a majority," Israelis have been "quite unaware of the profound changes in Catholic-Jewish relations." But things are changing, he stated, and gave two reasons.

John Paul II

The first impetus for change, according to the rabbi, "is the impact of the visit of the late Pope John Paul II in the year 2000."

Rosen noted that Israel and the Holy See had established full bilateral relations six years earlier, which had positively influenced perceptions of the Church among Israelis, "it was the power of the visual images, the significance of which Pope John Paul II understood so well, that revealed clearly to the majority of Israeli society the transformation that had taken place in Christian attitudes and teaching toward the Jewish people with whom the Pope himself had maintained and further sought mutual friendship and respect."

"For Israelis," he continued, "to see the Pope at the Western Wall, the remnant of the Second Temple, standing there in respect for Jewish tradition and placing there the text that he had composed for a liturgy of forgiveness that had taken place two weeks earlier here at St. Peter's, asking Divine forgiveness for sins committed against the Jews down the ages,

was stunning and overwhelming in its effect."

Rosen credited John Paul II's visit not only for changing attitudes, but also for opening up "the remarkable new avenue for dialogue, understanding and collaboration in the form of the bilateral commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry, established at John Paul II's initiative and praised extensively by Pope Benedict XVI during his pilgrimage to the Holy Land last year and also in his words at the great synagogue here in Rome earlier this year."

Rosen said a second factor leading to a change of attitude of Israelis toward Christians "is the influx of other Christians who have doubled the demographic make-up of Christianity in Israel."

The rabbi reported that some 50,000 Christians immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union over the past 20 years, and who are full Israeli citizens, but that there is also a large population of migrant workers who are mainly Christian.

He said these migrant workers, of which half either entered illegally or overstayed their visas, are from the Philippines, Eastern Europe, Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa.

--- --- ---

On ZENIT's Web page:

Full text: [www.zenit.org/article-30645?l=english](http://www.zenit.org/article-30645?l=english)