



ICCJ Rome Conference 2015

The 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*:  
The Past, Present and Future of the Christian-Jewish Relationship

50° anniversario della Dichiarazione conciliare *Nostra Aetate*:  
passato, presente e futuro delle relazioni ebraico-cristiane

## Opening Session

Sunday, June 28, 2015, Pontifical University Urbaniana

### Greeting

*Philip A. Cunningham*  
(ICCJ President)

Welcome to the 2015 annual conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews! We have gathered from many countries and several continents to mark an important landmark in the history of interreligious relations: the issuance fifty years ago of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* by the Second Vatican Council.

I must begin by immediately thanking the conference co-chair, Marco Morselli, the Amicizia Ebraico-Cristiana di Roma, the entire planning committee, ICCJ General Secretary Anette Adelman and the team at the Martin Buber House, and the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews for the enormous labors that have gone into making this conference the largest in the history of the ICCJ! We have all literally come to Rome both to celebrate history and to make history!

Today's Christian-Jewish relationship might be compared to a newborn human being. Just as a major milestone in child development is learning how to speak, an initial task for those after the Shoah who sought rapprochement between Jews and Christians was to learn *how* to talk to one another. Although human babies are genetically "hard-wired" toward language acquisition, pioneering Christians and Jews were challenged by centuries of hostility, suspicion, stereotyping, fear, and oppositional thinking. With this history, could Jews and Christians ever really communicate with one another? Some influential leaders in both communities said no.

Another human developmental challenge is the formation of personal identity that is both in relationship with and in distinction from other human beings. In the first decade of life one's childhood family of origin plays a crucial role, in adolescence one's peers become highly influential, and later one's adult family, friends, co-workers, etc. all play important roles. However, Judaism and Christianity have been interacting historically—and, therefore, also theologically—even as far back as the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This interaction for good or ill inevitably has had consequences for identity formation in each community. Or to put it another way, each tradition's self-understanding has been affected by its experiences of and attitudes toward the Jewish or Christian other.

Although one can only push metaphors so far, if generally speaking Jews and Christians have been interacting for about two thousand years, then the five decades since *Nostra Aetate* amount to only one-fortieth of that entire history. If the human lifespan in the Western world is rounded off to be about 80 years of age, then the new relationship between Christians and Jews has only reached the equivalent of toddlerhood! We are only just learning how to walk together!

Nonetheless in many parts of the world Jews and Christians have begun to speak to each other beyond surface-level descriptions of their respective customs. We have begun to understand our different perspectives and concerns. We are doing so with few positive precedents from our particular received traditions and with many caricatures and misunderstandings confounding our efforts.



That is why the ICCJ family has gathered in Rome. We will remember the past, consider how far we've come and discuss the issues that challenge us. We will look forward to a future of friendship and possibility that our ancestors of not very long ago could scarcely have imagined!

At the risk of sounding too much like the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympic Games: let the conference begin!