



ICCJ International Abrahamic Forum International Conference

**La Baume, Aix en Provence
26 - 28 June 2013**

Combatting Our Teachings of Contempt; Jewish, Christian and Muslim Introspection and Projection

STATEMENT

The International Abrahamic Forum held its first public conference in June in Aix-en-Provence, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the well-known French historian Jules Isaac in this very city.

Jules Isaac coined the phrase “the teaching of contempt” (l’enseignement du mépris) with reference to the Christian roots of anti-Semitism, which had been perpetuated by the Church for over 1800 years. It was Isaac’s meeting with Pope John XXIII about this “teaching of contempt” towards Jews and Judaism, which was to pave the way for one of the most important milestones in Jewish-Christian relations, the Second Vatican Council’s declaration “Nostra Aetate”.

In the decades since then, Europe, along with the world in general, has changed tremendously. At the same time that it has increased exponentially in population it has seemingly contracted in size as transportation and communication have brought religions, nations, peoples and cultures closer together and increased our mutual interaction. In our shrinking world we continue to observe teachings of contempt – not simply in relation to Jews but in relation to so many of our communities that bump up against one another increasingly as the distance of our vistas contracts.

The International Abrahamic Forum has dedicated its annual conference to looking at how we can combat the teachings of contempt toward the religious “other” that we find in all of our religious traditions, and how we can replace these with teachings of esteem. While some difficult texts can be and have been interpreted as teaching contempt towards those outside our communities, the overwhelming message of our faith traditions is love and respect for all God’s creations. How can we stress the trajectories of respect and mutuality that our traditions teach and combat the vectors of fear?

Over the days of our conference, we have studied the complexity of our religious traditions. In seeking to create a “safe space” for dialogue and understanding, we have begun the long process of examining our differing theologies, liturgies and practices along with the ways in which they have been reflected and communicated through traditional and modern media.

We have looked at ways of reaching out to those whose faiths differ from our own. In dialoguing with other faith traditions, we have faced difficult scriptural verses in our own traditions that demand we be self-critical in our attitudes towards “the other.” We have shared our religious “best practices” and have energized our efforts at this time of great need, in order to take from this conference the tools which will enable us to reach out to our own communities and to find the common within the diversity that we consider part of God’s plan.

* This statement was produced by the International Abrahamic Forum steering committee with valuable input from conference participants.