

## If distancing between Jews and Catholics returns

**As we are all united in remembering the Shoah, we must remember the cry of alarm of the Chief Rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni,**

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[Unofficial translation]

The anguished but very lucid words of the chief rabbi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni, for the thirty-fifth Day of Jewish-Christian Dialogue have not been taken up—with very rare exceptions—by the Italian media. It is a serious silence, which signals inattention towards one of the most significant consequences of the ongoing war in the Middle East: the breakdown of that long process of reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity begun by the [Second Vatican] Council, which had borne important fruits not only in political détente with the State of Israel, but above all in the historical-theological understanding of the Christian tradition itself.

Instead, today everything is returning as if this path had not existed, reports Di Segni, who cited the words of the bishop of Antwerp and those of an Italian theologian as an example. In a letter to his "Jewish friends," [Johan Bonny](#) speaks of an irreparable theological rift that exists between the Jewish and Christian traditions, denies the State of Israel's right to exist, and in fact, from a religious point of view, does not recognize its [the Jewish tradition's] particular path of salvation. The theologian Alberto Maggi—but he is not the only one—openly disputes the right of Jews to the land of Israel and accuses them of cruelty, thus by implication invoking the ancient accusation of deicide. Many Catholic figures, even at the highest levels, once again describe the Jewish people today as vindictive, merciless, and put [them] on the same level as Hamas, both described in the same way: terrorists.

Di Segni cites a serious gesture by the Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, the Franciscan Pierbattista Pizzaballa, to which not much attention has been paid: the fact that he went to celebrate Christmas mass with a keffiyeh over his cardinal's vestments. Moreover, during the Christmas period many spoke of baby Jesus as a little Palestinian: whereas, the chief rabbi of Rome reminds us, as should be universally known, that he was a Jewish child. To say that Jesus was Palestinian means cancelling the very identity of Christ and of Christianity itself. Today, it means equating Jesus with the inhabitants of Gaza in an abusive and superficial way. Addressing Catholics, Di Segni says, "You don't have a monopoly on peace since we also want peace, but true peace." The problem is that we Jews—he explains—"also want the defeat of the evildoers who have perpetrated a massacre and can carry out others; and we do not think that war is always a defeat for everyone, because we remember the necessary defeat of Nazi Germany." In short, as we can see, we have returned to substantial misunderstanding between the religions, because theological incomprehension, even if antisemitism is condemned in words, actually reawakens ancient [anti-Judaism].

Rabbi Di Segni, who has always been recognized as a calm person and on excellent terms with Catholics, invites us to delve deeper into an analysis of what is happening, which instead is often resolved in a hasty search for victims with whom we can side in order to feel better. And he invites us to mend the thread torn on a theological level before the rift solidifies again. His is an important cry of alarm that involves everyone, even non-believers. The cultural identity of the West in fact arises from the relationship between the Jewish tradition, the classical tradition, and the Christian tradition. In the last century we had an example, with Nazism, of what can happen if dignity and historical truth are denied to one of these roots, the Jewish one. Which of course—but need it be said?—does not mean denying the possibility, in certain cases the necessity, of criticizing this or that specific decision of a specific Israeli government, such as that of Netanyahu in this case. While we sadly together observed the memory of the Holocaust, we must remember this cry of alarm from Chief Rabbi Di Segni, and not pretend that what is happening around the war against Hamas is not an episode of antisemitism with nothing to do with the Nazi genocide. Without pretending that the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were the good guys, while those fighting in Gaza today are so bad as to make people believe that Jesus absolutely could not have been one of them.