

Italian Rabbinic Assembly, “Statement on the Day of Dialogue”

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<https://moked.it/blog/2025/01/15/dialogo-tutti-i-dubbi-dei-rabbini-italiani/>

On the occasion of the Day of Dialogue, we would like to make a few comments on the state of the Jewish-Christian relationship.

Although especially at the local level there are fruitful collaborative relationships today between the Jewish and Catholic communities in Italy, we believe that the dialogue is experiencing a moment of profound crisis and that this crisis is mainly driven by the stance taken by an important part of the Catholic world over the past year, after the tragic events of October 7, 2023.

We have taken note of two phenomena above all: a lack of empathy and an underestimation of the resurgence of antisemitism and anti-Judaism.

Let us start with the first point.

The Catholic Church has legitimately expressed profound empathy for the Palestinian population, a population that is undoubtedly experiencing a tragedy caused by a war that began at the instigation of Hamas on October 7, 2023, followed by the Israeli reaction, a tragedy that we hope in our prayers will end as soon as possible.

What seems to be missing is a comparable empathy towards the Israeli population, subjected to a terrible massacre on October 7, the kidnapping of hostages held in atrocious conditions by Hamas, the continuous launch of missiles (about 40,000 missiles and drones in total) on the civilian population, which caused destruction and massacres (just to give one example: the children of the Majdal Shams football field) and that led to evacuations in both Southern and Northern Israel. But above all, [empathy for] a population that lives a frightening prospect, surrounded by enemies who explicitly declare that they want to destroy what they call the "Zionist entity".

It is disconcerting that nowadays the threat to completely destroy a nation (remember the clock in Tehran that would signal the last days of Israel) and that could lead to the extermination of millions of Jews does not cause scandal.

We have heard very little about all this from the voice of the Catholic world and, in particular, from the voice of the Pontiff who, other than generic declarations of closeness to people and prayers for them, when he wanted to rattle the saber, did so almost exclusively in relation to Israel.

What has not been lacking, however, is the participation of Catholic voices, in this case including the Pope as well, in the process of demonizing Israel – accused of genocide, of all sorts of crimes, of deliberately killing children, of starving the civilian population; accusations formulated without taking into account any data that contradicts this reconstruction of the facts and without stressing the terrible accountability of Hamas, which uses civilians as human shields. We are crushed under partisan propaganda that often has terrorist organizations as its source.

We are surprised that you do not worry about the danger of these stances, or that we would not wonder if much of this can resurrect monsters that we thought were buried.

Let us remember the teaching of contempt, to which Jules Isaac referred, which was the starting point of Jewish-Catholic dialogue. Such teaching has been practiced throughout much of the history of Catholicism. The Jews, in the not-too-distant past, were considered deicides, infanticides, parasites who suck the blood of the innocent, usurers who starve and exploit the poor.

Are you so sure that all this will not resurface?

Are you sure that the State of Israel is not attacked for what it is and represents, rather than for what it does?

Are you sure that the ease and intensity with which only the State of Israel is attacked does not rekindle an ancient anti-Jewish heritage?

Are you sure that it is mere coincidence that only sporadic references are made to the countless massacres that victimize human beings at this moment (to give a few examples: South Sudan, Syria, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Libya, Yemen, etc.), while what is happening in Gaza is emphasized every day with resounding and blunt expressions?

Are you sure that it is normal that there is not the slightest understanding of a country that tries to fight for its existence, while it is part of the tradition of the Church to try to understand everyone's rationales, even the less defensible ones?

Does it seem normal to you, if we are to listen to what was communicated by Iranian representatives (and which has not been denied), that the Pope expressed an unequivocal condemnation of the Israeli government in the presence of the representatives of Iran, that is, of a country that mercilessly attacks any form of dissent, where in the last year more than 900 death sentences have been carried out, and that has explicitly proposed the destruction of the State of Israel for over 40 years?

We do not believe that the Catholic Church is antisemitic, or that the leaders of this very important institution are antisemitic. We believe, however, that this institution is underestimating the resurgence of antisemitism and anti-Judaism.

A Russian intellectual of the late 19th century, [Leon] Pinsker, said that antisemitism is a hereditary pathology. Precisely for this reason it is extremely dangerous: it is very difficult to fight a hereditary disease, because it unexpectedly reemerges as well.

P.S.: We appreciated Cardinal Zuppi's stance on the shameful episode in Bologna* and his clear condemnation of all forms of antisemitism. We are convinced that this position is shared by many friends in the Catholic world, but we do not believe that this is enough; there needs to be a more structured reflection on what is happening.

[* On Saturday, January 11, 2025, demonstrators vandalized the historic synagogue building and hurled explosives.]