SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO
HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
BIURO PRASOWE STOLICY APOSTOLSKIEJ دار الصحافة التابعة للكرسي الرسولي

N. 190228a

Thursday 28.02.2019

Audience with participants in the Meeting to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of Cardinal Agostino Bea

At 10.40 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the meeting to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of Cardinal Agostino Bea, organized by the "Cardinal Bea" Centre for Jewish Studies in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the *Center for the Study of Christianity* of the Jewish University of Jerusalem.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I greet all of you and I offer you a warm welcome. I thank Cardinal Koch for his kind words of introduction to our meeting.

Your Centre, in collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pontifical Biblical Institute and the Center for the Study of Christianity in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is commemorating Cardinal Augustin Bea by a series of scholarly lectures marking the fiftieth anniversary of his death. You thus have an opportunity to reconsider this outstanding figure and his decisive influence on several important documents of the Second Vatican Council. The issues of the Church's relationship with Judaism, Christian unity, and freedom of conscience and religion, remain significant and extremely timely.

Cardinal Bea should not only be remembered for *what* he did, but also the *way* he did it. He remains a model and a source of inspiration for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, and in an eminent way for the "intra-familial" dialogue with Judaism (cf. COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS, *The Gifts*

and the Calling of God are Irrevocable, 20). Nahum Goldmann, then President of the World Jewish Congress, used three words to describe Bea: “understanding, good and courageous” (*Staatsmann ohne Staat. Autobiographie*, 1970, 378). These are three essential requisites for anyone who works for reconciliation between human beings.

First, understanding with regard to others. Cardinal Bea was convinced that love and respect are the primary principles of dialogue. He was convinced that “Respect will also teach us the right way to propose the truth” (*L’Unione dei Cristiani*, 1962, 72). It is true: there is no truth apart from love, and love finds expression above all in the capacity to accept, to embrace, to take to oneself (“com-prehend”). Second, goodness and humanity, the ability to forge bonds of friendship based on our shared fraternity as creatures of God who is Father and desires us to be brothers and sisters. Understanding that accepts the other, and goodness that seeks out and creates bonds of unity: these were sustained in him – and here is a third requisite – by a courageous temperament that Father Congar defined as “stubborn patience” (S. Schmidt, *Augustin Bea, The Cardinal of Unity*, 1992, 538). Cardinal Bea faced a number of obstacles in his efforts on behalf of dialogue. Although accused and maligned, he moved forward with the perseverance of one who never stops loving. When told that the times were not ripe for what the then Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity was proposing, he responded spiritedly: “Then we have to make them ripe!” (cf. A. BEA, *L’ecumenismo nel Concilio*, 1968, 36). Neither an optimist nor a pessimist, he was a realist about the future of unity: on the one hand, conscious of the difficulties, on the other convinced of the need to respond to the heartfelt desire of the Lord that his disciples be “one” (*Jn* 17:21).

As Cardinal Bea put it, “the Council should not be a goal but rather a point of departure” (*L’unione dei cristiani*, 22). With you, then, I would like to emphasize the fruitful advances made in dialogue between Jews and Catholics after Bea and following his example. Your Centre represents a fundamental step on this journey. In asking the Gregorian University to establish the Centre, the Holy See charged it to become “the Catholic Church’s premier program in Jewish Studies” (*Joint Declaration on the Program of Jewish Studies*, 14 November 2002). In reaffirming this desire, I congratulate the students who have undertaken the challenge of studying Hebrew and becoming acquainted with a religious and cultural world of great richness and complexity. I encourage you in this effort. I think too of the teaching staff, who so generously offer their time and expertise. In a particular way, I would say a word to the Jewish instructors from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and elsewhere who are engaged in the work of the Centre. You are teaching in an environment where your very presence represents a novelty and already sends a message. How can we introduce students to authentic dialogue without knowledge from within? Dialogue calls for hearing two voices, and the witness of Jewish and Catholic instructors who teach *together* is worth more than many speeches.

How are we to continue this journey? Up to now, Jewish-Christian dialogue has often taken place in settings for the most part reserved to specialists. Specialized research and knowledge are essential but not sufficient. Together with this path, there is a need to set out on another, broader one: that of making known the fruits of the dialogue, so that it will not remain the prerogative of a select few, but become a productive opportunity for many. Friendship and dialogue between Jews and Christians need to pass beyond the boundaries of the scientific community. It would be wonderful, for example, if in the same city rabbis and parish priests could work, together with their respective communities, in service to those in need and by promoting paths of peace and dialogue with all. I am confident that your commitment, your research and personal ties between Christians and Jews can produce a fertile terrain for planting the roots of further communion.

Dear friends, may this commemoration of the person and work of Cardinal Bea be a stimulus to strengthening our irreversible commitment to the quest for unity between Christians, and to promoting in concrete ways renewed friendship with our Jewish brothers and sisters. With these prayerful good wishes, I invoke upon you and your work the abundant blessings of the Most High. Thank you.