

75 YEARS AFTER SEELISBERG - REFLECTION

BY

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CONTINUING ALONG THE PATH BEGUN IN SEELISBERG

In the summer of 1947 in Seelisberg a group of Jews and Christians met and together wrote *An Address to the Churches*. It was a new starting point, after centuries of misunderstanding and mistrust, of contempt and hatred, persecution and harassment. A process of *teshuvah* began in which progressively more and more people became involved over time.

The participants in that Conference had become aware of the link between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism and were convinced that condemning anti-Semitism alone was not enough, it was necessary to work patiently and carefully to correct that theology of substitution that had caused so much damage, not only to Jews, but also to Christians.

The participants at the Seelisberg Conference stated that in spite of the Shoah «anti-Semitism has lost none of its force, but threatens to extend to other regions, to poison the minds of Christians and to involve humanity more and more in a grave guilt with disastrous consequences». These are words that unfortunately we can repeat today: even after the Shoah, anti-Semitism and hatred for the Jews have not disappeared; rather, they have taken on new forms and poisoned the minds and hearts of many of our contemporaries in many parts of the world.

Shadows are not lacking, neither are lights. For example, as far as the situation in Italy is concerned, the UCEI (Union of Italian Jewish Communities) appointed for the first time in 2021 a Councillor with responsibility for interreligious dialogue. This is a sign that awareness of the need and urgency to engage with other religions, and Christianity in particular, is also growing in the Jewish world.

In Camaldoli - a Benedictine monastery in the province of Arezzo - the 41st Jewish-Christian Colloquium was held in December 2021. The theme was Yeshua/Jesus and Israel 61 years after the historic meeting between Jules Isaac and John XXIII. The presentation programme included the following words of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks: «Can the world be changed? The answer is yes, and the proof is one of the most uplifting stories in the religious history of humanity: the changed relationship between Jews and Christians after the Shoah. There are many heroes, Christians of moral courage, deep faith and unparalleled humanity who realised after that terrible end that something had to change. [...] On 12 September 2013, in an open letter to the editor of an Italian daily newspaper, La Repubblica, the current Pope Francis wrote: “God’s fidelity to the covenant made with Israel has never failed, and through the terrible trials of these centuries the Jews have preserved their faith in God. And for this, to them, we will never be sufficiently grateful, as the Church, but also as humanity”. It is perhaps the first time that a pope has publicly acknowledged that, in remaining faithful to their faith, the Jews had remained loyal to God, not unfaithful. This is a declaration capable of changing the world».

In Camaldoli, *Sedici schede* (teaching papers) were also presented, the result of a joint project of the CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference) and the UCEI: a group of experts examined some manuals for the teaching of the Catholic religion and then prepared papers to clarify gaps and misunderstandings that were found. The topics are: *The Relationship between Old and New Testament, Written and Oral Torah; Priests and Rabbis; The Election of Israel; The Name of God; Justice and Mercy; Women in Judaism; Precepts and Values; The Cycle of Life; Jewish Festivals; People of Israel and Land of Israel; Italian Jews; Jewish-Christian Dialogue from the Second Vatican Council to Today; Jesus as a Jew; Paul as a Jew.*

Another significant project is *La Bibbia dell’Amicizia* (San Paolo 2019-2021): three volumes, 1,200 pages, 123 authors, Jews and Christians committed to commenting on pericopes of the Bible in a spirit of friendship (*amicizia* is a reference to the AEC- Amicizie Ebraico-Cristiane). It is a tool to make known to a wider public the renewal of biblical studies that is underway, a prelude to a renewal of theological studies as well.

We are also busy preparing for the bicentenary celebrations of the birth of Rabbi Elia Benamozegh (Livorno 1823-1900), a forerunner of Jewish-Christian dialogue no less important than Franz Rosenzweig, though less well known. He pointed out that in the Torah in addition to a particularistic dimension (Moshe's covenant) there is also a universalistic dimension (Noah's covenant) and stressed that in our time it is important for Judaism to confront Christianity and Islam.

These are some of the scenarios that have been opened by continuing along the path begun in Seelisberg. We are looking forward to more.

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