



## ICCJ Consultation

Online, February 6 + 8, 2022

### **The Jewish or Christian 'Other' in Teaching and Preaching**

#### Introduction:

This topic is not new, in fact it is recurrent and we are regularly reminded, sometimes painfully, of its relevance. Considering the breadth and depth of the academic research on Jewish Christian relations and dialogue, the institutional documents written by many Churches and even more recently by Jews representing different Jewish denominations alongside dialogue on grass roots and leadership levels, how we represent the religious other should no longer be an issue, and yet it is.

This consultation seeks to attempt a better understanding of why this might still be the case and to open the conversation in an existential way. What Christians say about Jews in preaching and praying affects Jews in their existence (not necessarily threatening it, though that has happened even recently) and what Jews say about Christians in synagogue affects our relationship as people of faith and even sometimes leads to threats or violence in Israel where Christians are a minority.

In this consultation, we will rely on available data and research but will also seek to confront our self-understanding, both as Christians and as Jews, and our inclination “to other” the other. In this case, othering and self-understanding are two sides of one same coin.

Jews and Christians share a unique bond drawing on a shared history and an overlapping collection of books, Scripture. This linkage is not found between other religions. It binds us to each other in ways that can, sometimes, be experienced as uncomfortable by some. It is precisely that bond that has established our identities over time, unfortunately mostly through canceling the other out. In our new relationship, the past and its violence continue to play a role, accelerating, and sometimes erupting in our midst, threatening the change of mind and heart promised by our rapprochement.

We define ourselves often over and against the other. We are Christians because we are not Jews, we are Jews because we are not Christians. We have a very long history of doing that, preaching that, teaching that and even praying that. We chant familiar hymns, recite familiar prayers with disparaging remarks without being conscious of it and we often consult old family Bibles with disparaging footnotes that continue to leave their mark. After all, this is also about tradition, and religions do not easily abandon tradition.

Drawing on recent research and on institutional documents we have learned that our identities also resonate with each other while at times continuing to cause dissonance.

Here are but two examples:

Jews usually accept the dissonance willingly, we find separation and diversity to be positive, Christians may hold the opposite view and prefer inclusiveness.

Christian identity can be defined as an embracing of certain beliefs, whilst Judaism is about peoplehood and belonging. That major difference makes it sometimes very difficult to



understand what the other really is as we tend to view him/her in our own terms and from our own perspective. Anything else takes us out of our comfort zone.

Peoplehood also means that a connection to a particular land is natural. A religion does not need a country that it calls its own, and therefore easily spiritualizes land. This also contributes to othering the Jews.

This persistent habit of othering is sometimes complex and sometimes simply unconscious. It even happens in every day speech. We often draw on a ready-made rhetoric when we do that, we do not even have to use new words, we do it out of habit, a habit that is ancient, possibly even atavistic.

In this consultation we would like to discuss why the misrepresentation of the other is still with us despite the newly proclaimed amity between Jews and Christians, and to discern, through concrete approaches and examples, how we can increase our awareness of it and counter the phenomenon.

*Liliane Apotheker*

ICCJ President