

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

November 8, 2012 at 11:26am

Cardinal: Vatican-SSPX talks do not signal toleration of anti-Judaism

by Cindy Wooden

Vatican City — The effort to reintegrate the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X into the Catholic church "absolutely does not mean" that the Catholic church will accept or support the anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic positions espoused by some members of the society, said Cardinal Kurt Koch.

The cardinal, president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, said many Jews "fear that through the eventual reintegration of a series of priests and faithful with anti-Jewish tendencies and who fundamentally reject 'Nostra Aetate,'" the Second Vatican Council document on relations with Jews and with other religions, "the Catholic church could give a new direction to its dialogue with Judaism."

Addressing members of the commission, which oversees and promotes a variety of Vatican dialogues with Jews, Koch said, "The Holy Father has charged me with presenting the question in the correct way: 'Nostra Aetate' is not being questioned in any way by the magisterium of the church as the pope himself has demonstrated repeatedly in his speeches, his writings and his personal gestures regarding Judaism."

"The Catholic church is moving firmly on the basis of the principles affirmed in 'Nostra Aetate,'" and Pope Benedict XVI intends to continue the church's dialogue with the Jewish people, the cardinal said in his speech, which was published Wednesday in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper.

"Nostra Aetate" described Christians and Jews as having a common heritage and a profound spiritual bond; it denounced any form of contempt of the Jews; it said the Jews could not be held responsible for the death of Jesus; and "it explicitly highlighted the Jewish roots of Christianity," Koch said.

In discussions about the SSPX and the Second Vatican Council, the cardinal said, questions also have

been raised about the level of teaching authority in various council documents; the idea has been raised that because "Nostra Aetate" was a declaration and not a constitution, its content has less weight.

"On a formal level, a distinction certainly can be made" between the council's declarations and constitutions, he said. "Nevertheless, from the point of view of their content, they cannot be separated from each other or placed in opposition to each other."

"Nostra Aetate," he said, was not "an isolated meteorite that fell from heaven," but it flowed from the other teachings of the council, particularly the council's reflections on the mystery of the church.

Koch said Pope Benedict's full support of the teaching on Judaism adopted by the council was evident even before the council began meeting in 1962. As a student of the scriptures, the then-Joseph Ratzinger had "a considerable familiarity with Judaism," he said.

"The foundation of the vision of Ratzinger the theologian is that holy scripture can be understood only as one book," in which the history of salvation begins with God's covenant with the Jewish people, he said. "In the light of these theological convictions, one cannot be surprised that Pope Benedict is continuing the work of reconciliation begun by his predecessors in Jewish-Catholic dialogue."

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