

Italian rabbis opt out of 2009 Catholic-Jewish dialogue day

ROME - Saying they were not satisfied with Vatican explanations concerning a Good Friday prayer for the Jews, members of the Italian Rabbinical Assembly said they would not co-sponsor the annual Day of Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in January.

The rabbinical assembly and the Italian bishops' conference have together sponsored the Jan. 17 dialogue day since 1990.

Rabbi Giuseppe Laras, president of the assembly, announced Nov. 18 that the Jewish community would not participate in the 2009 event because, "according to our point of view, nothing satisfactory" has come out of discussions about Pope Benedict XVI's new text for the Tridentine-rite Good Friday prayer for the Jews.

The rabbi said the pope's text encourages Catholics to pray that Jews would recognize Christ as the savior. In addition, he said, by praying they would be enlightened the prayer implies that the Jews are blind to the truth.

The first line of the prayer, published last February for use only at services following the 1962 Roman Missal, says: "Let us pray for the Jews. May the Lord our God enlighten their hearts so that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ, the savior of all men."

Bishop Vincenzo Paglia of Terni, Narni and Amelia, president of the Italian bishops' commission for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, told Vatican Radio Nov. 20, "Obviously we are pained by the decision taken by the rabbinical assembly."

He noted that Vatican officials have reassured Jewish leaders by pointing out that

the prayer “puts everything into the hands of the Lord” and refers to the church’s hope for the salvation of all people at the end of time.

The second line of the prayer reads: “Almighty and everlasting God, you who want all men to be saved and to reach the awareness of the truth, graciously grant that, as the full number of the Gentiles comes into your church, all Israel may be saved.”

Bishop Paglia said the Italian bishops would mark Jan. 17, 2009, as a day for “Jewish-Christian reflection,” in the hope that it would “deepen further the indispensable connection and relationship between Christians and Jews.”