

Vatican-Jewish dialogue warns of ‘moral crisis’ in secular society

VATICAN CITY – A Vatican-Jewish dialogue commission warned of a “moral crisis” in modern secular society, and said religions need to respond with prayer, charitable action and dialogue.

Believers today need to show through word and action that human rights are connected with moral duties, representatives of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Vatican’s Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews said in a statement March 31.

The joint statement, released by the Vatican April 1, came at the end of a three-day meeting of the bilateral commission in Jerusalem. It was the 10th meeting in a dialogue that began in 2002.

While modern progress has brought many benefits, the statement said, it has also been marked by “rampant consumerism and a nihilistic ideology with an exaggerated focus on the individual.” All that has led to a modern moral crisis, it said.

“Together with the benefits of emancipation, the last century has witnessed unparalleled violence and barbarity. Our modern world is substantially bereft of a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose,” it said.

Faith and religious leadership have a critical role to play in responding to these challenges, it said. Religions can provide hope and moral guidance by promoting awareness of the divine presence, emphasizing the importance of prayer and Scripture study, and always being open to dialogue, it said.

The statement said the witness of believers should take place on many fronts: through operation of charitable institutions and special care for the vulnerable and sick; by engaging institutions of civil law on justice issues; and in education, outreach to youth and effective use of the media.

During the encounter, the Vatican delegation reiterated the teaching of the Second Vatican Council regarding the divine covenant with the Jewish people, that “Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made.”

The commission also expressed the hope that the Vatican and Israel would reach agreement on unresolved bilateral issues regarding the church’s financial and legal standing in Israel. Negotiations on these issues have been going on for more than a decade.