

Global Conversation with Rabbi Jack Bemporad



On November 4th, the global governance students had the chance and the extreme privilege of attending a global conversation with Rabbi Jack Bemporad.

Before offering you a brief resume of Rabbi Bemporad's presentation, will provide a quick description about his life, his biography and his "journey" that made him today an internationally recognized theologian, scholar and advocate.

Mr Bemporad escaped fascism in Italy; he came to the United States at the age of six. A brilliant student, he received a B.A. degree in philosophy at the University of Tulane and a specialization at the Hebrew Union College. He has served as an Adjunct Professor of Philosophy and religion at the Southern Methodist University and currently is a professor of Interreligious Studies at the Vatican's Angelicum University in Rome.

He is recognized at the international level for his diplomatic skills and leadership concerning the religious understanding and reconciliation. Unusual enough to be emphasized, he is one of the rare Jewish leaders to have had a personal audience with the pope John XXIII and many meetings with Pope John Paul II. He was also one of three rabbis to have blessed him before his passing.

Rabbi Bemporad has worked often with several Imams and Muslims and has contributed to soothing and improving the relations among the different, although unfortunately discordant religions.

Mr Bemporad is also an author of numerous books and articles. Here is a list of a few of them:

- *Our age: The Historic New Era of Christian-Jewish Understanding*, published by New City Press.
- *The Inner Journey: Views from the Jewish Tradition*, by Morning Light Press
- Contributor to the chapter on “Norms of war in Judaism” for *World Religions and Norms of War*, published by the United Nations University Press.
- Lately, he contributed to a memoir of the philosopher Hans Jonas in *Giacobbe E L'Angelo (Jacob and the Angel)*, published in Rome in 2012.

Finally, we can denote a few distinctions given to Rabbi Jack Bemporad that testify to his work, as the prestigious Luminosa Award of the Focolare Movement and the Raoul Wallenberg Humanitarian Award of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies of Ramapo College.



Now that we have provided some information about Mr Bemporad's route, let's concentrate on what he told us during the global conversation and what advice we have had the great chance to get from his visit.

Bemporad's speech dealt with the dialogue between different religions and its problems. He expressed all his sadness for the lack of interreligious dialogue that characterize the contemporary society. He found the roots of this problem in the period after the World War II, where the families had many prejudices towards Christians that did not help Jewish people during the deportation in the concentration camps.

An important role in filling this gap was played especially by three popes: John XXIII, John Paul II and Francesco I.

Bemporad defined Pope XXIII 'a very religious person, who has suffered all the pain of the poor, and had a sort of agony'. According to him, Pope John XXIII could understand the sufferings of the Jewish people with an extraordinary empathy.

In 1986, Pope John II visited the synagogue in order to change the ideas of Jewish and make it available to everybody that wanted to enter there. The most important thing to stress is that Pope John II went there as the representative, the head of the Christian Church, not as a common man visiting the synagogue, in order to emphasise the will of the Catholic church to find an agreement, a way of coexistence. This was an incredible step forward, because until 1986, Christians have always treated Jews with contempt.

In 1987, perhaps the most important thing happened in the history of interreligious dialogue: Pope John Paul II apologized seven times towards all other religions for the crimes committed during the years by the Catholic Church.

In 1978, a sentence by Pope John Paul II made the whole world think about the need of tolerance and the greatness of this man: 'We have to overcome prejudices and discrimination. It's important to understand other religions'.

And, last but not least, Pope Francesco I in Israel said 'No Christian can be anti-Semite'.

The core of the speech was the distinction between Christians, that promote the relationship with dialogue, and Jews, that want a relationship with negotiation. As you can see their approach is completely different, but we can say that this is because of the history and the past of the Jewish people. That's why, in our opinion, all Christians have to help Jews to open their hearts to the world, overcoming the prejudices and without thinking at the past and all the sufferings they have lived, all the wars and the ethnic fights that happened during the centuries.

As Bemporad said, everyone has to make clear their faith, accepting the other religions without forcing other people to accept yours. We need to guarantee religious rights: how can you talk about Christianity without talking about Jews?

We finish our report about Global Conversation with Mr. Rabbi Jack Bemporad saying that everyone has a key role in society today for religious understandings, no one could be anti-Semite for some sentences written in the New Testament or by some ideas for Christians to be superior.

The extreme privilege that we had to welcome Mr. Bemporad will be without any doubt an enlightening experience for the rest of our University course and even a great inspiration for our personal lives.

Cristina Bottoni
Yannis Boukobza