

Israeli rabbis send letter to Vatican expressing concern over papal remarks

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Pope Francis speaks on the phone during his weekly general audience on August 11, 2021 at Paul VI hall in the Vatican. (Photo by Andreas SOLARO / AFP)

Rabbi Ratzon Arusi, the chair of the Chief Rabbinate's Commission for Dialogue with the Holy See, has expressed concern over recent remarks by Pope Francis about Jewish law, Reuters report.

According to the report, Arusi sent a letter to the Vatican requesting clarification of comments the pope made to a general audience earlier this month.

On August 11, Francis spoke at the Vatican about the first five books of the Bible, known in Hebrew as the Torah. The pope referenced the biblical story of God giving the Torah to the Jewish people: "God offered them the Torah, the Law, so they could understand his will and live in justice. We have to think that at that time, a Law like this was necessary, it was a tremendous gift that God gave his people."

Later, however, Francis said: "The Law, however, does not give life, it does not offer the fulfillment of the promise because it is not capable of being able to fulfill it. The Law is a journey, a journey that leads toward an encounter... Those who seek life need to look to the promise and to its fulfillment in Christ."

Arusi sent a letter on behalf of the Chief Rabbinate to Cardinal Kurt Koch, whose Vatican department includes a commission for religious relations with Jews.

“In his homily, the pope presents the Christian faith as not just superseding the Torah; but asserts that the latter no longer gives life, implying that Jewish religious practice in the present era is rendered obsolete,” Arusi reportedly wrote in the letter. “This is in effect part and parcel of the ‘teaching of contempt’ towards Jews and Judaism that we had thought had been fully repudiated by the Church.”



Rabbi Ratzon Arusi (Yonatan Sindel/Flash90)

The rabbi asked Koch to “convey our distress to Pope Francis,” and requested clarification from the pope to “ensure that any derogatory conclusions drawn from this homily are clearly repudiated,” Reuters reports.

Koch’s office says today that he has received the letter and is “considering it seriously and reflecting on a response.”