

Nostra Aetate

Vatican II: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

Thoughts. Memories. Resources

On the 58th Anniversary of Nostra Aetate

28 October (1965 – 2023)

A groundbreaking teaching

Nostra Aetate (“In Our Time”) is the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that marked a significant turning point in the way Catholics related to people of non-Christian religious traditions.

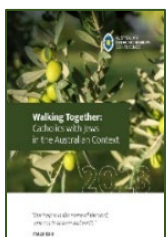
We might describe this shift as being from an attitude of suspicion to respect; from defensiveness to openness; from distance to partnership. Today, the Church encourages interfaith dialogue and seeks to journey with people of other religious communities.

In particular, paragraph 4 of *Nostra Aetate* reflects the unique relationship between the Church and the Jewish people, with common spiritual roots and a shared Scripture.

Nostra Aetate 4 teaches that:

- The Church has a permanent bond with the Jewish people, the “stock of Abraham”. Jesus, Mary and the Apostles were Jews; Christianity’s roots lie in Judaism.
- The Jewish people are steadfastly loved and called by God. Pope John Paul II would later speak of the “irrevocable” covenant between God and Israel.
- Antisemitism is condemned. This teaching remains vitally relevant, given rising levels of antisemitism in the world today.

Subsequent statements by Popes, Bishops conferences and Vatican commissions affirm and ‘unpack’ these conciliar insights. (*Dialogika*: <https://ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements>)



As recently as 2023, the Australian Catholic Bishops issued a short, insightful statement:

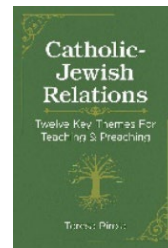
Walking Together: Catholics with Jews in the Australian Context

Download this document at the [ACBC website](https://www.acbc.org.au/).

Professional development

Significant developments in Catholic-Jewish relations have occurred since *Nostra Aetate* emerged.

Two recent publications that can assist in upskilling homilists and teachers in this area are:



Catholic-Jewish Relations: Twelve Key Themes for Teaching and Preaching

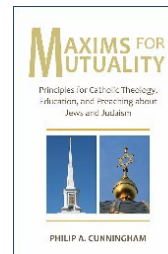
By Teresa Pirola

Paulist Press/Stimulus, 2023 (224 pp)

An introductory guide to important themes in conciliar, papal and curial statements of the Catholic Church as part of its ongoing dialogue and friendship with the Jewish people. The intent of the author, an Australian faith formator and pastoral animator, is that the gains of the past 60 years of ecclesial renewal be better known to non-specialist and grassroots audiences.

Further details: www.lighttoforah.net/more

To order: AUD 42.95 RRP from paulinebooks.com.au or USD 27.95 from paulistpress.com



Maxims For Mutuality: Principles for Catholic Theology, Education and Preaching about Jews and Judaism

By Philip A. Cunningham

Paulist Press/Stimulus, 2022 (124 pp)

By a leading scholar in the Jewish-Christian theological dialogue, this book offers a set of ten maxims designed as a guide for Catholic theologians, preachers, and educators in knowing how best to approach Judaism and to ‘walk with’ Jews.

For details go to the Paulist Press website.

Continued overleaf.

Download this page at www.lighttoforah.net/more

Jules Isaac: a name for every Catholic to know.

Jules Isaac is not well-known in grassroots Catholic circles, yet his impact on our Catholic story with respect to interfaith relations has been profound.

In the 1930s, Jules Isaac was a French-Jewish academic and educator, living and working in France, and engaged in historical research that uncovered patterns of anti-Judaism in Christian catechetical materials.

As Hitler's power extended across Europe, most of Jules Isaac's family, including his wife, Laure, were murdered in Nazi death camps. Jules miraculously escaped arrest. In hiding, he survived the war.

After the war, Isaac continued his research on antisemitism and forged collaborative relationships with like-minded Jews and Christians. In 1960 he reached out to Pope John XXIII with a plea that the Catholic Church review its thinking, language and practices where they expressed "contempt" for Jews due to erroneous views of Judaism and distorted understandings of the history of Christianity.

Their meeting sowed a vital seed. Today, we might describe it as an act of synodality: two men, both in their twilight years—the Bishop of Rome and a Jewish academic—in an honest conversation about the anguish, challenges and hopes of their times, imagining positive steps to be taken.

Shortly afterwards, Catholic-Jewish relations became part of the agenda of the Second Vatican Council and, in due course, *Nostra Aetate* emerged.

"Saint Paul also uses the lovely image of the olive tree to describe the very close relationship between Christians and Jews:

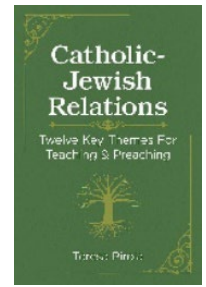
... we draw our nourishment from the same spiritual roots."

Pope Benedict XVI,
Verbum Domini, 43



Adult Formation Session

Below is a simple schema for 'breaking open' the topic of Catholic-Jewish relations, using the book *Catholic-Jewish Relations: Twelve Key Themes For Teaching and Preaching* by Teresa Pirola (Paulist Press, 2023).



Or: use a different text such as the 2023 Bishops' statement *Walking Together* – see overleaf.

75-MINUTE SESSION

Introduction (10 min)

- Opening prayer: A psalm of your choice, from the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament.
- Why this session? This is an opportunity to learn about a significant, yet underappreciated, area of church teaching on interfaith relations. Facilitator outlines some points from the book's Introduction.
- Brief pair-share:
 - ✓ Share one initial thought, question or experience that relates to this topic.

Reading & Discussion (60 min)

- There are 12 chapters. Divide the group into units of pairs or small groups.
- Ask each unit to read Chapter 1, followed by an additional chapter of their choice.
- Allow 35 min reading time.
- Invite discussion:
 - ✓ 15 min, in pairs or small groups
 - ✓ 10 min feedback in large group

Closing comments (5 min)

- Pair-share or large group sharing:
 - ✓ One important idea that stays with me, or
 - ✓ One take-away action I will implement.
- Closing blessing: Numbers 6:24-26

Adapt this schedule as your situation requires.



A resource by Light of Torah

Light of Torah encourages Christian appreciation of and respect for Judaism as a present-day, living tradition.

www.lightoftorah.net