

A Brief Note on:

DEI VERBUM; LUMEN GENTIUM

In light of the teaching of *Nostra Aetate*
Second Vatican Council

The 1965 Vatican II document [Nostra Aetate](#) is widely regarded as an historic ‘game-changer’ for the Catholic Church’s relationship with Judaism and the Jewish people (and with other religions as well). However, in terms of its authoritative weight, it is sometimes described as being “only” a declaration of the Second Vatican Council; it lacks the authority of a dogmatic constitution which is the highest level of Catholic teaching of such a council. It is sometimes argued that *Nostra Aetate* was “merely” a pastoral document, and therefore its teaching is not strictly theological and not binding on the faithful.

Yet this ‘minimalist’ view is to overlook the fact that *Nostra Aetate* is not the only conciliar statement to address the Church’s links with the Jewish people. Walter Kasper—president of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 2001-2010—citing the support of Pope Benedict XVI, describes the teaching as “irrevocable” and “irreversible”:

On the Catholic side the declaration of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, was the decisive turning point. It is — as Benedict XVI made absolutely clear once again during his visit to the Roman synagogue on January 17, 2010 — irrevocable. It is irreversible because of the plain fact that the decisive theological arguments of the declaration *Nostra Aetate* are firmly established in two higher-ranking conciliar constitutions, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Nos. 6, 9, 16) and the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Nos. 3, 14).¹

For example, in *Dei Verbum*, 14, the Council fathers taught:

The plan of salvation foretold by the sacred authors, recounted and explained by them, is found as the true word of God in the books of the Old Testament: these books, therefore, written under divine inspiration, remain permanently valuable.

And in *Lumen Gentium*, 16:

There is, first, that people to whom the covenants and promises were made, and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rom. 9:4-5).

The points above offer a starting point for reflection, however nothing replaces a reading of the texts themselves. Access them at the [Dialogika](#) online library (maintained by the Council of Centres on Jewish-Christian Relations and the Institute for Jewish-Catholic Relations of Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia). Quotations from *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum* are from the [Dialogika](#) website.

¹ See Walter Kasper’s Foreword to *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationships*, eds. Philip A. Cunningham et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), xi. It can be accessed online at the [Dialogika](#) website.