

## Summary of Vatican's New Document on Catholic-Jewish Relations

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### **The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable: a Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate'**

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The Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has published today the document “The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable: a Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of 'Nostra Aetate' (No. 4)”.

The text consists of a Preface and seven chapters, entitled:

“A brief history of the impact of 'Nostra Aetate' (No.4) over the last 50 years”,

“The special theological status of Jewish-Catholic dialogue”,

“Revelation in history as 'Word of God' in Judaism and Christianity”,

“The relationship between the Old and New Testament and the Old and New Covenant”,

“The universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and God’s unrevoked covenant with Israel”,

“The Church’s mandate to evangelise in relation to Judaism”, and

“The goals of dialogue with Judaism”.

“Fifty years ago”, says the Preface, “the declaration 'Nostra Aetate' of the Second Vatican Council was promulgated. Its fourth article presents the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people in a new theological framework. The following reflections aim at looking back with gratitude on all that has been achieved over the last decades in the Jewish–Catholic relationship, providing at the same time a new stimulus for the future. Stressing once again the unique status of this relationship within the wider ambit of interreligious dialogue, theological questions are further discussed, such as the relevance of revelation, the relationship between the Old and the New Covenant, the relationship between the universality of salvation in Jesus Christ and the affirmation that the covenant of God with

Israel has never been revoked, and the Church's mandate to evangelize in relation to Judaism. This document presents Catholic reflections on these questions, placing them in a theological context, in order that their significance may be deepened for members of both faith traditions. The text is not a magisterial document or doctrinal teaching of the Catholic Church, but is a reflection prepared by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews on current theological questions that have developed since the Second Vatican Council. It is intended to be a starting point for further theological thought with a view to enriching and intensifying the theological dimension of Jewish–Catholic dialogue”.

The first chapter explains that great steps have been taken in the dialogue over the last fifty years, and from a detached co–existence we have arrived at a deep friendship. The Conciliar declaration “*Nostra aetate*” (No.4) definitively clarified, for the first time, the theological position of the Catholic Church with respect to Judaism; the document has had a profound impact on many levels.

With regard to the special theological status of Jewish–Catholic dialogue, the second chapter affirms that due to the Jewish roots of Christianity, the dialogue with Judaism cannot in any way be compared with the dialogue with the other world religions. Jesus can only be understood in the Jewish context of his time, even though as the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God he transcends that historical horizon.

God reveals himself in his Word, he communicates with humanity. For Jews, this Word is present in the Torah; for Christians, the Word of God is incarnated in Jesus Christ. However, the Word of God is indivisible and calls people to respond in such a way that enables them to live in the right relationship with God, as explained in the third chapter.

The relationship between the Old and New Testament and the Old and New Covenant is the subject of the fourth chapter. There is an indissoluble unity between them, even though the two Testaments are interpreted differently by Jews and Christians on the basis of their respective religious traditions. For Christians, the Old Testament is to be comprehended and interpreted in the light of the New Testament. The Old and the New Testament are part of the one and only history of the covenant between God and his people, even though the New Testament is to be considered as the fulfilment of the promises of the Old.

The fifth chapter emphasises that through Jesus Christ – and through his death and resurrection – all people have a part in salvation, all are saved. Although Jews cannot believe in Jesus Christ as the universal redeemer, they have a part in salvation, because the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. How that can be possible remains an unfathomable mystery in the salvific plan of God.

The sixth chapter considers the Church's mandate to evangelise in relation to Judaism. While in the dialogue with Judaism Catholics bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ, they refrain from active attempts at conversion or mission towards Jews. The Catholic Church does not envisage any institutional mission towards the Jews.

In the seventh and final chapter, it is concluded that engaging in fraternal dialogue, Jews and Catholics must learn to understand one another better, to seek reconciliation increasingly, and to commit themselves together to promote justice, peace and the care of creation, and to make every effort to oppose anti–Semitism. They must intensify their cooperation in the humanitarian sphere in assisting the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalised, in order to become, together, a blessing for the world.