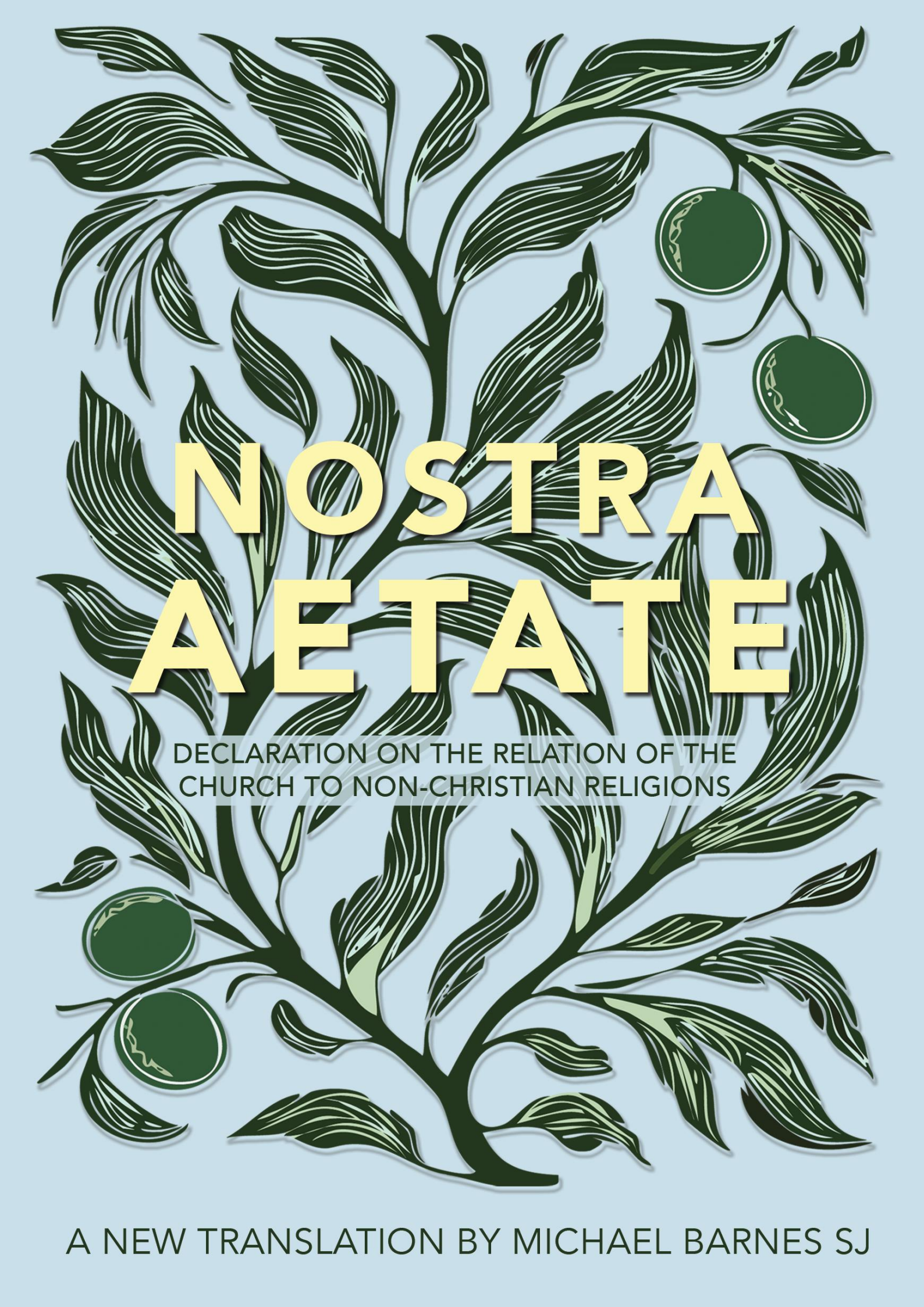


A stylized illustration of an olive branch with dark green leaves and olives, set against a light blue background. The branch is the central focus, with leaves and olives extending towards the corners of the frame.

NOSTRA AETATE

DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE
CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

A NEW TRANSLATION BY MICHAEL BARNES SJ

This new, unofficial translation of *Nostra Aetate* has been produced in partnership with Westminster Interfaith, to mark the 60th anniversary of the promulgation of the document.

Westminster Interfaith is an Agency of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster (www.rcdow.org.uk).

The production of this text has been made possible by a grant from the estate of the late Rosemary Moffat, always a keen supporter of interreligious dialogue.

The translation is based on the official Latin text of *Nostra Aetate*, as published on the Vatican website: www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_lt.html.

In this translation, most of the footnotes in the original text have been placed as 'in-text' references ('See such-and-such.'). Two slightly longer references have been placed as end-notes to the text for ease of reading.

Translation – © Michael Barnes SJ, 2025

Design and Layout – © Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster, 2025

Back Cover Image – © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

Sixty Years of *Nostra Aetate*

Nostra Aetate is the shortest of the documents of Vatican II: forty-one sentences in the original Latin and a mere 1716 words in this new translation. When it was finally promulgated on 28th October, 1965, it was unprecedented: not just a repudiation of anti-Semitism and attitudes of hatred towards the Jewish people, but the first positive statement by the Church on the truths and values of other religions. If the Council itself marked an opening to 'the world' as a whole, *Nostra Aetate* recognised a plurality of religious worlds and exhorted the Church to take them seriously through 'conversations and collaboration' (§2). In the sixty years since that momentous day in the history of the Catholic Church, *Nostra Aetate* has become a charter for interreligious dialogue everywhere, used not just by Catholics and other Christians, but by other people of faith as well.

Nostra Aetate began as a document drafted by Cardinal Bea, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, to address what Jewish historian and Holocaust survivor Jules Isaac called the Christian 'teaching of contempt' for the Jews. From 1960 to 1965, Bishops from the Middle East asked that the document include reference to Islam, whilst Bishops from Africa and Asia wanted a further expansion, one that embraced the other two-thirds of the world's religious peoples.

The document Bea brought to the Council in November 1964 crafted a new framework for the contentious relationship between Jews and Christians. It added a new introduction using language from the history of religions, brief references to Hinduism and Buddhism and 'other religions which are to be found throughout the whole world', and powerful exhortations to 'acknowledge, preserve, and promote those spiritual and moral good things' (§2) to be discerned among these people.

Judaism and Christianity have a privileged relationship, historically as well as theologically; that is where the Church begins. But, as the New Testament bears witness, the Church's identity is always hybrid, Jewish *and* Gentile. Christian faith only comes to life when it leads to the creation of further relationships by engaging with other peoples, other cultures, and other religious worlds.

In the sixty years since *Nostra Aetate*, that plurality of religious voices has led to new approaches in the Christian theology of religions, a category of thought that never existed in 1965. The theology of *Nostra Aetate* is distinctly muted. But that, perhaps, is its strength. It is remarkable not for any great theological insight but for the fact that it happened, that a tragedy within the history of the relations between Jews and Christians was addressed and efforts were made to build bridges for a safer, more generous future. It needs to be read as a record of genuine interreligious learning, as an example of what courage and hope can achieve, and as a witness to the power of the Holy Spirit, who brings about a transformation of the soul of human beings.

Michael Barnes SJ, October 2025

Nostra Aetate

Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions

1. In this age of ours, when every day the human race is being drawn more closely together, and the ties between different peoples are increasing, the Church gives closer attention to its relationship to non-Christian religions. In its task of promoting unity and love among peoples, indeed among nations, the Church considers above all what human beings have in common and what things draw them to fellowship.

One is the community of nations, one the origin they share, for God made the whole human race to live over the entire face of the earth. (See Acts 17.26.) One also is their final goal - God, whose providence, testimony of goodness, and intentions for salvation extend to all, (See Wisdom 8.1; Acts 14.17; Romans 2.6-7; 1 Timothy 2.4.) until the elect are united in the holy city which the brightness of God will illuminate and where the nations will walk in God's light. (See Revelation 21.23-24.) Men and women expect from the various religions answers to the hidden enigmas of the human condition, which today, as in times long ago, deeply stir the inner hearts of humanity. What is the human person? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is good and what is sin? What is the origin, what is the purpose, of human suffering? What is the way to attain true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that final unutterable mystery which gathers up our existence, from which we take our rise and towards which we move?

2 From ancient times to the present, there is found among the various nations a certain perception of that hidden power which is present in the course of things and the events of human history – and at times an acknowledgement of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. Such thoughtful awareness penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense. The religions associated with the progress of culture strive to respond to these questions with more subtle ideas and more developed language. Thus, in Hinduism the divine mystery is explored and propounded with an inexhaustible wealth of myths, and with penetrating philosophical investigations. Freedom is sought from the distresses of our state through various forms of ascetical life, through the depths of meditation, through taking refuge in God with loving confidence. In Buddhism, according to its various forms, the radical inadequacy of this changing world is acknowledged, and a way is taught whereby men and women with a devout and confident spirit may be able to reach a state of perfect freedom or acquire perfect illumination, whether through their own efforts or through help from on high.

In like manner too, other religions which are to be found throughout the whole world strive in various modes to relieve the anxieties of the human heart by proposing ways (*vias*), that is to say, teachings and precepts for human living as well as sacred rites.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It regards with sincere respect those ways of acting and living, those precepts and teachings which, while differing from what it holds and expounds, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all human beings. Indeed, the Church proclaims and is bound to proclaim Christ who is 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 4.6), in whom people find the fulness of religious life, and in whom God has reconciled all things to God's own self. (See 2 Corinthians 5.18-19.)

The Church, therefore, exhorts its sons and daughters that, in prudence and love, through conversations and collaboration (*colloquia et collaborationem*) with the members of other religions, and in witness to Christian faith and life, they should acknowledge, preserve, and promote (*agnoscant, servent et promoveant*) those spiritual and moral good things, the social and cultural values, found among these people.

3 The Church also looks upon the Muslims with esteem. They worship one living and subsistent God, merciful and omnipotent, creator of heaven and earth,¹ who has spoken to human beings and to whose decrees, even those that are hidden, they seek to submit themselves completely, just as Abraham, from whom the Islamic faith freely takes its rise, submitted himself. They venerate Jesus as a prophet, even though they do not acknowledge him as God, and they also honour Mary, his virgin mother, and sometimes devoutly call upon her. In addition, they wait for the day of judgement when God will grant their due reward to all those who have been brought back to life. Hence, they value the moral life and worship God, especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since over the course of the centuries not a few quarrels and enmities between Christians and Muslims have arisen, this holy synod urges everyone to forget all that has passed and to work sincerely for mutual understanding, and together to preserve as well as promote social justice and peace and liberty for the benefit of all human beings.

4 Reflecting on the mystery of the Church, this holy synod recalls the link whereby the people of the new covenant are spiritually united with the stock of Abraham. For the Church of Christ acknowledges that the beginnings of its own

faith and election are already to be found among the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets, in accordance with the saving mystery of God. It therefore confesses that all who place their faith in Christ, children of Abraham according to faith, (See Galatians 3.7.) are included in the same Patriarch's call, and that the salvation of the Church is mystically prefigured in the exodus of the chosen people from the land of bondage.

Hence the Church cannot forget that it was through the people, with whom God in God's own inexpressible mercy concluded the ancient covenant, that it received the revelation of the Old Testament and continues to draw nourishment from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree on to which have been grafted wild shoots, the Gentiles. (See Romans 11.17-24.) For the Church believes that Christ, our peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles and by his cross made them both one in himself. (See Ephesians 2.14-16.)

The Church also keeps forever before its eyes the words of the Apostle about his own people: 'theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them according to the flesh is the Christ' (Romans 9.4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. And the Church recalls that the Apostles, the Church's foundation and pillars, sprang from the Jewish people, as well as so many of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world.

As holy scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not know the time of its visitation, (See Luke 19.44.) and for the most part the Jews did not accept the gospel - indeed, many of them fought against its spread. (See Romans 11.28.) Nevertheless, according to the Apostle, because of their ancestors, the Jews remain very dear to God (*adhuc carissimi manent*) whose gift and call are without regret.² (See Romans 11.28-29.) Together with the prophets and the same apostle, the Church awaits that day known only to God, when all peoples will call upon the Lord with one voice and will serve him together 'under one yoke' (Zephaniah 3.9). (See Isaiah 66.23; Psalm 65.4; Romans 11.11-32.)

Since, therefore, the spiritual heritage common to both Christians and Jews is so great, this sacred synod seeks to foster and commend that mutual understanding and respect which is acquired especially through biblical and theological studies and from friendly conversations (*colloquia*).

Even though the Jewish authorities with their followers urged the death of Christ, (See John 19.6.) nevertheless what happened during his passion cannot be blamed indiscriminately on all Jews living at the time, still less on the Jews of today.

While the Church is accounted the new people of God, the Jews are not to be represented as rejected or cursed by God, as if this followed from sacred scripture. Therefore, all should take care that in whatever pertains to catechesis or the proclamation of the Word of God nothing is taught which is not in keeping with the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, the Church, which rejects (*reprobat*) all persecutions against any people, remembering its shared inheritance with the Jewish people and motivated not by political reasoning but by the religious love of the Gospel, deplores (*deplorat*) hatred, persecution, and manifestations of anti-Semitism directed against Jews at whatever time and by whomsoever.

Besides, as the Church has always maintained and still maintains, Christ freely and out of infinite love went to his passion and death for the sins of all humankind, that all might attain to salvation. It is the duty of the preaching Church, therefore, to announce the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the source of all grace.

5 We cannot truly call on God as the father of all if we refuse to treat in a brotherly and sisterly way any persons whatever for all are created in the image of God. The relation of human beings to God the Father and their relations to other men and women are so intimately linked together that Scripture says: 'The one who does not love does not know God' (1 John 4.8).

Therefore, the foundation is taken away from any theory or practice which discriminates between human beings or between peoples with regard to their human dignity and the rights that flow from it.

The Church rejects (*reprobat*) as foreign to the mind of Christ any kind of discrimination whatsoever between people, or harassment of them, done by reason of birth or colour, class or religion. On the contrary, this holy synod, following in the footsteps of the holy apostles, Peter and Paul, begs the Christian faithful to 'maintain noble conduct between all the peoples' (1 Peter 2.12), and - where it is possible - to live in peace with all human beings (See Romans 12.18.) so that they may truly become sons and daughters of the Father who is in heaven. (See Matthew 5.45.)

¹ See Gregory VII, *Epist. III, 21 ad Anazir, Regem Mauretaniae*, ed. E.Casper in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (Hanover & Berlin, 1826-), *Ep. Sel. II*, 1920, I. p 288, 11-15; PL 148, 451 A.

² See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, AAS 57 (1965), p.20.



ULIVO PIANTATO
DA
S.S. PAOLO VI
IL
4 GENNAIO 1964

**"OLIVE TREE PLANTED BY HIS HOLINESS
PAUL VI ON 4TH JANUARY 1964."**

The Garden of Gethsemane,
Mount of Olives, Jerusalem