News
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Pope John Paul II greets Rabbi Elio Toaff at Rome's main synagogue April 13, 1986, in a meeting that marked the first time a pope had entered the Rome synagogue. The 1965 Vatican document *Nostra Aetate*, which turns 60 this year, paved the way for improved Catholic-Jewish relations. (CNS file/Arturo Mari)

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Originally issued in 1965 during the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate* has become recognized as a landmark shift in the Roman Catholic Church's approach to other religions, especially Judaism.

The document was part of the sweeping reforms issued by the 1962-65 council. The Catholic Church's long history of antisemitism, rooted in theology that blamed Jews for the death of Jesus, prompted appeals for change. Pope Paul VI issued *Nostra Aetate* on Oct. 28, 1965, after intense negotiations within the council over several issues, including how far-reaching the document should be about Catholicism's relationship to other faiths generally.

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In its final form, *Nostra Aetate* explicitly rejects the claim that Jews as a whole are responsible for the death of Jesus and condemns antisemitism. It affirms the shared spiritual heritage between Christians and Jews and calls for mutual respect.

The document also recognizes elements of truth and holiness in other major world religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, and urges Catholics to engage in dialogue and cooperation with followers of those faiths.

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Coming after the horrors of the Holocaust and World War II, historians and church officials say *Nostra Aetate* paved the way for improved Catholic-Jewish relations, theological reassessments, and practical cooperation, including papal outreach such as subsequent visits to synagogues, and joint declarations with Jewish leaders.

Nostra Aetate also encouraged and advocated for interreligious engagement more broadly, influencing Catholic education, diplomacy and pastoral practice. The document states that the church "rejects nothing that is true and holy in other religions," and that other faiths "often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men." It emphasizes encounters with other faiths, including shared moral concerns and collaboration for peace.

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