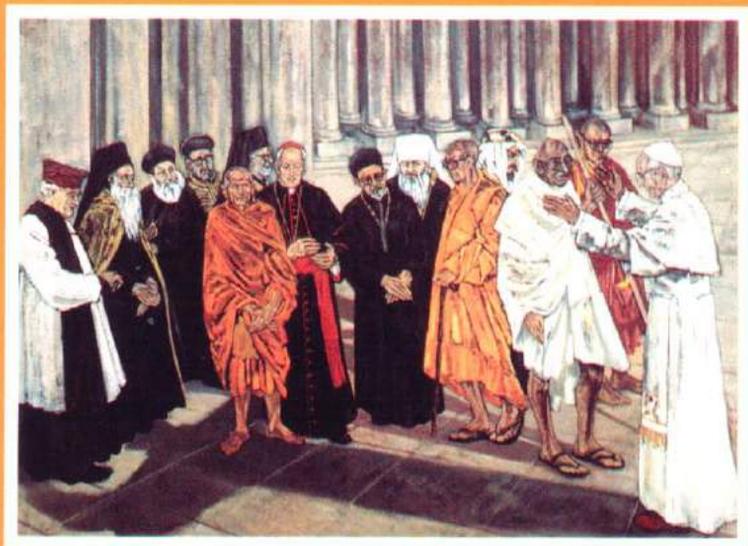


**Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue**



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**The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church  
from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II  
(1963-2005)**

**Edited by Francesco Gioia**

  
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## 1. *Nostra Aetate*

### 1. Introduction

In this age of ours, when men are drawing more closely together 1 and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.

All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from 2 the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26) and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men (cf. Ws 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rm 2:6-7; 1 Tm 2:4) against the day when the elect are gathered together in the holy city which is illumined by the glory of God, and in whose splendor all peoples will walk (cf. Rv 21:23-24).

Men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved 3 riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and toward which we tend?

### 2. The Various Religions

Throughout history, even to the present day, there is found among 4 different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. At times there is present even a recognition of a supreme being, or still more of a Father. This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is

imbued with a deep religious sense. The religions which are found in more advanced civilizations endeavor by way of well-defined concepts and exact language to answer these questions. Thus, in Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which men can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help. So, too, other religions which are found throughout the world attempt in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a program of life covering doctrine, moral precepts, and sacred rites.

- 5 The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (cf. 2 Co 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life.
- 6 The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve, and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.

### 3. Islam

- 7 The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth<sup>1</sup>, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. St. Gregory VII, Letter III, 21 to Anazir (Al-Nasir), King of Mauretania PL, 148, 451 A.

Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values. 8

#### 4. Judaism

Sounding the depth of the mystery which is the Church, this sacred Council remembers the spiritual ties which link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham. 9

The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. She professes that all Christ's faithful, who as men of faith are sons of Abraham (cf. Ga 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call and that the salvation of the Church is mystically prefigured in the exodus of God's chosen people from the land of bondage. On this account the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God, in his inexpressible mercy, established the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Rm 11:17-24). The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself (cf. Ep 2:14-16). 10

Likewise, the Church keeps ever before her mind the words of the Apostle Paul about his kinsmen: "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the Christ" (Rm 9:4-5), the son of the virgin Mary. She is mindful, moreover, that the apostles, the pillars on which the Church stands, are of Jewish descent, as are many of those early disciples who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ to the world. 11

As holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize God's moment when it came (cf. Lk 19:44). Jews for the most part did not accept the Gospel; on the contrary, many opposed the spreading of it (cf. Rm 11:28). Even so, the Apostle Paul maintains that the Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made (cf. Rm 11:28-29; LG 57). Together with the prophets and that same Apostle, the Church awaits the day, known by God alone, when all people will call on God with one voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Ws 3:9; cf. Is 66:23; Ps 65:4; Rm 11:11-32). 12

- 13 Since Christians and Jews have such a common spiritual heritage, this sacred Council wishes to encourage and further mutual understanding and appreciation. This can be obtained, especially, by way of biblical and theological inquiry and through friendly discussions.
- 14 Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. Jn 14:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the Church is the new People of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed, as if this followed from holy Scripture. Consequently, all must take care, lest in catechizing or in preaching the Word of God, they teach anything which is not in accord with the truth of the Gospel message or the spirit of Christ.
- 15 Indeed, the Church reproves every form of persecution against whomsoever it may be directed. Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.
- 16 The Church always held and continues to hold that Christ out of infinite love freely underwent suffering and death because of the sins of all men so that all might attain salvation. It is the duty of the Church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace.

### **5. Universal Fraternity**

- 17 We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image. Man's relation to God the Father and man's relation to his fellowmen are so dependent on each other that the Scripture says "he who does not love, does not know God" (1 Jn 4:8).
- 18 There is no basis, therefore, either in theory or in practice, for any discrimination between individual and individual, or between people, arising either from human dignity or from the rights which flow from it.
- 19 Therefore, the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life, or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to "conduct themselves well among the Gentiles" (1 P 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (cf. Rm 12:18), and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven (cf. Mt 5:45).

## 2. *Lumen Gentium*

### 1. The Church, Sacrament of Christ<sup>2</sup>

Christ is the light of humanity. It is, accordingly, the heartfelt desire of this sacred Council, being gathered together in the Holy Spirit, that, by proclaiming his Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk 16:15), it may bring to all men that light of Christ which shines out visibly from the Church. Since the Church, in Christ, is the nature of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men – she here proposes, for the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth as clearly as possible and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission. The condition of the modern world lends greater urgency to this duty of the Church; for, while men of the present day are drawn ever more closely together by social, technical and cultural bonds, it still remains for them to achieve full unity in Christ. 20

### 2. Universality of the One People of God<sup>3</sup>

The one People of God is accordingly present in all the nations of the earth, since its citizens, who are taken from all nations, are of a kingdom whose nature is not earthly, but heavenly. All the faithful scattered throughout the world are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit so that “he who dwells in Rome knows those in most distant parts to be his members.”<sup>4</sup> Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world (cf. Jn 18:36), the Church or People of God which establishes this kingdom does not take away anything from the temporal welfare of any people. Rather she fosters and takes to herself, insofar as they are good, the abilities, the resources, and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens, and elevates them. The Church indeed is mindful that she must work with that king to whom the nations were given for an inheritance (cf. Ps 2:8) and to whose city gifts are brought (cf. Ps 71 [72]:10; Is 60:4-7; Rv 21:24). This character of universality which adorns the People of God is a gift from the Lord himself whereby the Catholic Church ceaselessly and efficaciously seeks for the return of all humanity and all its goods under Christ the Head in the unity of his Spirit.<sup>5</sup> 21

<sup>2</sup>LG 1.

<sup>3</sup>LG 13.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*, 65; 1: PG 59, 361.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III, 16, 6; III, 22, 1-3; PG 7, 925C-926A, 955C-958A; Harvey 2, 87f., 120-123; Sagnard, ed. *Sources Chrét.*, pp. 290-292, 372ff.

- 22 All men are called to this catholic unity which prefigures and promotes universal peace, and in different ways to it belong, or are related: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation.

### 3. The Followers of Other Religions Can Be Saved<sup>6</sup>

- 23 Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the People of God in various ways.<sup>7</sup> There is, first, that people to which the covenants and promises were made, and from which Christ was born according to the flesh (cf. Rm 9:4-5): in view of the divine choice, they are a people most dear for the sake of the fathers, for the gifts of God are without repentance (cf. Rm 11:28-29). But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day. Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since he gives to all men life and breath and all things (cf. Acts 17:25-28), and since the Savior wills all men to be saved (cf. 1 Tm 2:4). Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.<sup>8</sup> Nor shall divine providence deny the assistance necessary for salvation to those who without any fault of theirs have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, and who, not without grace, strive to lead a good life. Whatever good or truth is found among them is considered by the Church to be a preparation for the Gospel<sup>9</sup> and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life. But very often, deceived by the Evil One, men have become vain in their reasoning, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and have served the world rather than the Creator (cf. Rm 1:21, 25), or else, living and dying in this world without God, they are exposed to ultimate despair. Hence to procure the glory of God and the salvation of all these, the Church, mindful of the Lord's command, "preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15), takes zealous care to foster the missions.

<sup>6</sup> LG 16.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theol.* III, q. 8, a. 3, ad 1.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Epistle (Ep.)*, of the Sacred Cong. of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston: DS 3869-3872.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparatio Evangelica*, 1, 1: PG 21, 28 AB.

#### 4. The Missionary Character of the Church<sup>10</sup>

For the Church is driven by the Holy Spirit to do her part for the full 24 realization of the plan of God, who has constituted Christ as the source of salvation for the whole world. By her proclamation of the Gospel, she draws her hearers to receive and profess the faith; she prepares them for baptism, snatches them from the slavery of error, and she incorporates them into Christ so that in love for him they grow to full maturity. The effect of her work is that whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil, and the happiness of man.

#### 5. The Eschatological Nature of the Christian Vocation<sup>11</sup>

The Church, to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which 25 by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things (cf. Acts 3:21). At that time, together with the human race, the universe itself, which is so closely related to man and which attains its destiny through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ (cf. Ep 1:10; Col 1:20; 2 P 3:10-13).

Christ, lifted up from the earth, has drawn all men to himself (cf. 26 Jn 12:23). Rising from the dead (cf. Rm 6:9) he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples and through him set up his Body which is the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father he is continually active in the world in order to lead men to the Church and through it, join them more closely to himself, and by nourishing them with his own Body and Blood, make them partakers of his glorious life. The promised and hoped-for restoration, therefore, has already begun in Christ. It is carried forward in the sending of the Holy Spirit and through him continues in the Church in which, through our faith, we learn the meaning of our earthly life while we bring to term, with hope of future good, the task allotted to us in the world by the Father, and so work out our salvation (cf. Ph 2:12).

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<sup>10</sup> LG 17.

<sup>11</sup> LG 48.