

Nostra Aetate In Our Time

Interreligious relations 50 years after
the Second Vatican Council

KAICIID
CID
DIALOGUE
CENTRE

Nostra Aetate, the 1965 declaration made by the Second Vatican Council on the relation of the Catholic Church to non-Christian religions, was a landmark document that changed the landscape of interreligious dialogue. In 2012, almost 50 years later, the International Dialogue Centre was established by Austria, Saudi Arabia and Spain, with the Holy See as the Founding Observer, with the mandate to promote the use of interreligious dialogue in preventing and resolving conflict and enhancing understanding and cooperation globally. This founding mandate builds on principles set forth in *Nostra Aetate* and, with the Holy See as our Founding Observer, the Declaration is very close to our heart.

In November 2015, a conference was convened at the Centre in Vienna to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the *Nostra Aetate* declaration and to reflect on its impact on interreligious relations over the past 50 years. Our Board of Directors, themselves representatives from major world religions, together with leading practitioners, joined us to corroborate the Declaration's continuing and powerful contribution to public life in improving interreligious understanding and collaboration.

This book has been compiled to commemorate that occasion in reproducing the commentary from those leading experts in interreligious dialogue who spoke at the conference and alongside whom it has been my privilege to work.

The UN Secretary General, speaking at the inauguration of the International Dialogue Centre, welcomed the initiative of our founding by saying: "We join forces to celebrate your efforts for cultural exchange and global harmony. We need to look no further than today's headlines to see why this mission is so important." These words are as urgent today as they ever were. It is crucial that we continue to provide the voices of responsible religious leaders and peacemakers to show the way to reconciliation on a global scale.



Faisal bin Muaammar
Secretary General, KAICIID

Nostra Aetate In Our Time

Interreligious relations 50 years after
the Second Vatican Council



Nostra Aetate In Our Time

Interreligious relations 50 years after
the Second Vatican Council

K A I C I I D
CIID
D I A L O G U E
C E N T R E



DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the publisher or imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Tudor Rose Holdings Ltd.

Although the authors and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at the time of going to press, the authors and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

ISBN: 978-0-9568561-7-3

Original title:

Nostra Aetate In Our Time
Interreligious relations 50 years after the Second Vatican Council

Text © KAICIID. All rights reserved.

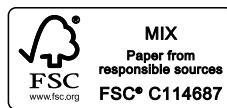
Photographs © as per credits

Edited by Mariela Hoyer Starcevic on behalf of KAICIID

Published in 2016 by Tudor Rose
6 Friar Lane, Leicester, LE1 5RA, United Kingdom
www.tudor-rose.co.uk

Typeset in Sabon and ITC Stone Sans

Printed and bound by Gomer Press
Llandysul Enterprise Park, Llandysul, Ceredigion, SA44 4JL, United Kingdom



K A I C I I D
CIID
D I A L O G U E
C E N T R E



About the International Dialogue Centre



The KAICIID Board of Directors comprises prominent representatives from five world religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) is an international organisation with the mission of promoting dialogue to help people to understand and respect different religions and cultures.

The Centre works to counteract discrimination and resolve conflict. It is the first intergovernmental organisation that teams up policymakers and religious representatives to encourage dialogue between people who may never meet or enjoy mutual trust, and to talk through their problems, especially if there is a cultural or religious issue at stake.

The governing Board of Directors comprises representatives of five major religions representing about 80% of the world's believers and thus offers the international community a unique asset.

Through its networks, the Centre has access to religious communities around the world. Combined with the support of the member governments, the Centre can convene influential stakeholders who usually never meet or collaborate, yet have many goals and methods in common. This collaboration between religious and secular leadership can create new, more inclusive solutions.

The Centre takes no side in any conflict since it is inclusive of all religions, yet not bound to any single faith or denomination.

By promoting dialogue, the Centre helps communities

to build peace and harmonious societies. To achieve this, the Centre fosters cooperation between diverse religious communities to close the divisions created when religion is manipulated to engender fear and hatred.

Our vision is a world in which there is respect, understanding and cooperation among people; justice, peace and reconciliation; and an end to the abuse of religion to justify repression, violence and conflict.

Our roles

- ❖ We help create the platforms, knowledge, and commitment that foster interreligious dialogue (IRD) in conflict areas
- ❖ We support international and national institutions in using IRD to work for positive change
- ❖ We convene religious leaders, policy makers and other stakeholders to engage in IRD
- ❖ We create and disseminate knowledge on IRD to help achieve peace and reconciliation.

What we do

We promote IRD to help find sustainable solutions to contemporary challenges and conflict situations, working in three priority areas:

- ❖ Applying IRD for peace and reconciliation in four designated conflict situations – Central African Republic, Iraq/Syria, Nigeria, and Myanmar
- ❖ Capacity-building efforts, which aim to empower religious leaders to become active peacemakers in communities experiencing conflict and division
- ❖ Working to advocate on behalf of IRD with international organisations, policy makers and other stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

The International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) would like to extend its special thanks to His Eminence Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, a friend and supporter of KAICIID since the very early days of its inception.

The Centre is grateful to the authors listed below for their contributions and energetic support in making this book possible, as well as for their tireless work in the field of interreligious dialogue.

Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer

Swami Agnivesh

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia

Dr. Hamad Al-Majed

Prof. Patrice Brodeur

His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel

Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel

His Excellency Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mcccj

Univ. Prof. em. Dr. Susanne Heine

Mag. Dr. Markus Ladstätter

Dr. Seyyed Ara'ollah Mohajerani

His Excellency Faisal bin Muaammar

Rev. Kosho Niwano

Rev. Mark Poulson

Chief Rabbi David Rosen

Dr. Mohammad Sammak

Archive photographs of papal visits and of the meeting of the Second Vatican Council are reproduced by kind permission of L'Osservatore Romano Servizio Fotografico, Vatican City.

Photographs of the KAICIID conference are supplied courtesy of Daniel Shaked.

Contents

Foreword IX <i>Mag. Dr. Markus Ladstätter</i>	Jewish-Christian relations since <i>Nostra Aetate</i>51 <i>Chief Rabbi David Rosen</i>
Chapter 1: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> for our time	Living dialogue among the Abrahamic faiths: the prophetic dimension..... 57 <i>Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel</i>
Introduction3 <i>His Excellency Faisal bin Muaammar</i>	
Opening remarks7 <i>His Eminence Cardinal Christoph Schönborn</i>	Chapter 4: Broadening interreligious dialogue and collaboration for our time
Chapter 2: Ecumenical perspectives of <i>Nostra Aetate</i>	Introduction 65 <i>Dr. Hamad Al-Majed</i>
Introduction 15 <i>Prof. Patrice Brodeur</i>	The anguish of our human condition – reflections on religious peacemaking..... 69 <i>Swami Agnivesh</i>
Orthodox perspectives on ecumenical and interreligious relations after <i>Nostra Aetate</i> 19 <i>His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel</i>	Liberation and illumination – reflections on creating a culture of dialogue and peace75 <i>Rev. Kosho Niwano</i>
<i>Nostra Aetate</i> and lessons learned for broader interreligious relations..... 23 <i>Univ. Prof. Em. Dr. Susanne Heine</i>	The Sikh perspective 81 <i>Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh</i>
Anglican responses to <i>Nostra Aetate</i> 29 <i>Rev. Mark Poulson</i>	Chapter 5: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> – creating a culture of inclusion
Chapter 3: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> and the religions of Abraham	<i>Nostra Aetate</i> – creating a culture of inclusion 91 <i>His Excellency, Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mccj</i>
Introduction 35 <i>Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer</i>	Chapter 6: <i>Nostra Aetate</i> – The Declaration
What can Muslims learn from <i>Nostra Aetate</i> ? 39 <i>Dr. Mohammad Sammak</i>	The Declaration..... 98
The importance of theology in interreligious relations..... 45 <i>Dr. Seyyed Ata’ollah Mohajerani</i>	



Introduction: The affirmation of the other

Mag. Dr. Markus Ladstätter

Markus Ladstätter, Mag. theol., Dr. theol., undertook his academic training in Comparative Religious Studies, Catholic Theology, Chinese Studies and Judaic Studies in Vienna, Jerusalem and Taipei.

Career summary

- ❖ Research into Chinese Religions, Buddhism and inter-religious relations
- ❖ Lecturer at University of Graz, Vienna University and Danube University Krems
- ❖ Professor at Catholic University College of Education, Graz, Austria
- ❖ Head of the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue at the Diocese Graz-Seckau
- ❖ Austrian Delegate, in charge of relations with Muslims in Europe, to the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE)
- ❖ Developed numerous interreligious field trips and study programmes in Asian and African countries.



Dr. Markus Ladstätter and students above Jerusalem





he usual image of religious communities draws them as either constantly referring to highly esteemed, age-old source texts or discussing controversially recent questions on their modern interpretation. It seems rather unusual that a text such as *Nostra Aetate* – neither ancient nor very recent – could have found its way into the very focus of intellectual attention.

So what are the reasons that not only Catholics and Christians of sister churches, but also members and representatives of other religions as well as secular thinkers refer to this relatively short declaration of the Second Vatican Council?

The answer to this question is shorter than the document itself. The text is, even today, both revolutionary and modern. “Revolutionary” because it marks a clear turning point within Catholic tradition in favour of – always somehow existing but often rather obscured – open-minded attitudes towards other religions, and “modern” because the visionary aim and intention of the text are not yet entirely fulfilled today, neither among religions or society, nor within the Church itself.

Nostra Aetate realises a very simple but far-reaching concept which I would like to call “the unconditional affirmation of the other”. When coming to discuss the Church’s relations to Hinduism and Buddhism, the text states that the Catholic Church “regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men” (NA II).

The surprising element in the above sentence is that this recognition of non-Christian religions is articulated in full awareness of the existing differences between those religions and the Catholic Church’s own positions. Moreover, one could usually expect a compromise formula stating that recognition is possible because of the religions’ many common positions, whereas differences are rather regarded as a more or less tolerable obstacle to this recognition. But here we find the opposite type of argumentation – that even the ways of religious conduct and teachings that differ from those of the Catholic Church often correspond to God’s truth.

Truth is not the exclusive possession of one specific religious community, i.e. the Catholic Church, but it is the truth of God who wants to enlighten all men and

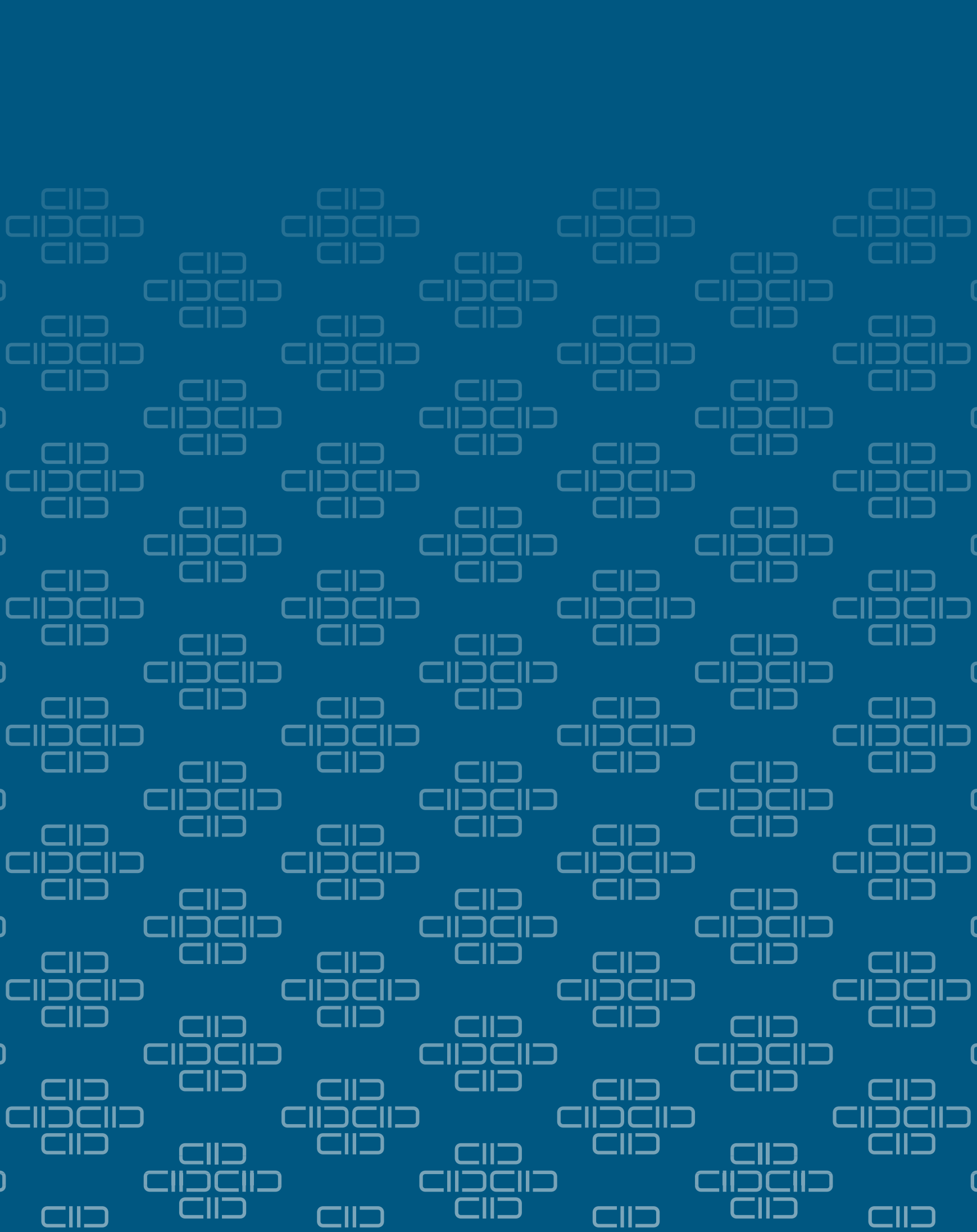
women, and it is therefore also found in other religions. Difference does not bring dialogue to an end, but rather to an opening.

The process of the text’s composition might also be a source of astonishment. The original draft was designed to focus on only one important issue, a Catholic declaration condemning anti-Judaism, without touching other religions. Nevertheless, this version met with resistance during the discussions of the council. The background of this resistance was not a persisting anti-Semitism but a quite realistic fear by Christians in the Middle East. Their objection was that Muslim leaders and countries would misunderstand a Christian document seeking reconciliation with Judaism as an articulation of political approval to the freshly established state of Israel, and therefore place massive pressure on Christian minorities living in those countries. For this reason the original draft of the declaration was given a broader horizon than Judaism, and it now covers all major world religions. Viewed retrospectively, this widening has been an important gain for the final text which did not drop the original intention, but included the Church’s attitude towards Judaism in the most elaborate chapter of the Declaration.

This short historical remark on the genesis of the text shows the connection of the document with the global political situation. At the same time, it engenders deep respect for the Council Fathers who successfully defended their convictions against those who wanted to skip the Judaism issue as well as those who opposed any open-minded approach to other religions.

In *Nostra Aetate*, the Catholic Church is not talking about other religions themselves, but about her own relations to these other religions. The perspective is not objectified judgement, but human relation. This intention is also expressed by the Declaration’s terminology, at least with reference to Judaism and Islam, where the text does not speak about those religions as such but about Muslims and Jews.

Fifty years ago, therefore, *Nostra Aetate* opened a space for genuine dialogue and encounter which is also sincerely realised in this conference and this publication by the following series of profound contributions.



Chapter I

Nostra Aetate for our time





Introduction

His Excellency Faisal bin Muaammar, KAICIID Secretary General

His Excellency Faisal Bin Abdulrahman Bin Muaammar was appointed Secretary General of the Vienna-based King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) in October 2012.

Prior to this appointment, he held a number of senior positions in the Saudi Arabian administration and various nonprofit organisations. He also holds the current position of Supervisor General to the King Abdulaziz Public Library and to the the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue in Riyadh (KACND).

Career summary

- ❖ Vice Minister of Education of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- ❖ Advisor to the Royal Court of Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud
- ❖ Deputy of the National Guard for Cultural and Educational Affairs, Saudi Arabia
- ❖ Instrumental in the foundation of the King Abdulaziz Public Library in 1987, and the King Abdulaziz Center for National Dialogue in 2003
- ❖ Advisor to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.



KAICIID Secretary General Faisal bin Muaammar speaks at an OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) discussion, 2015





et me start by saying salaam alaikum, peace be among all of you.

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, esteemed religious leaders, ladies and gentlemen, ambassadors, dear friends.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) for the discussion of *Nostra Aetate* and its impact on interreligious relations over the past 50 years.

We are deeply honoured to welcome to today's dialogue many esteemed leaders of religious communities in Austria and around the world. In particular, it is my privilege to welcome His Eminence Cardinal Schönborn. Thank you, Your Eminence, for your steadfast and courageous support for dialogue and solidarity here in Austria and around the world. We are very grateful to you for all of the support we get.

Allow me to go beyond my formal speech to say that, from the first day I arrived in Vienna to help establish this Centre, I received your full support and prayer. The time you gave me on many occasions facilitated so many opportunities for us, and helped overcome the many difficulties that we faced in building this institution.

I am also honoured that our distinguished multireligious Board of Directors joins us today. We are fortunate to have all of them here, having travelled from all over the world for this special occasion.

In Our Time, or *Nostra Aetate*, refers to both 2015 and 1965. Half a century ago, the Roman Catholic Church redefined its relationship with all other religions. The influence of that declaration has been felt for decades and has inspired change in our approach to interreligious dialogue. It has built new bridges between religious communities and has continued to make a powerful contribution to public life by improving interreligious understanding and collaboration.

We know that dialogue between followers of different religions can help to address the challenges facing the world such as violent extremism. I think that we all agree that religion is a central aspect of all human experience and that global dialogue is incomplete without recourse to religious leaders and communities. We need, therefore, to include the wisdom of religious people to promote dialogue as a means of building peace.

This particular initiative was launched as part of the vision of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques – the

late King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz. His vision included the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a means to achieving peace, coexistence and justice and of overcoming the difficulties facing humanity.

The initiative was adopted by the Islamic Summit held in Mecca in 2005. In 2007 the first meeting of its kind was held between the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, and Pope Benedict XVI within the framework of international efforts to place the initiative onto the global stage and to obtain international support. It is therefore an especially important occasion for us today to celebrate the very existence of the initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris and in many other places serve to spread fear and fuel hate. These attacks cannot be justified through any religion, culture, or identity. We cannot allow the support of violence to divide peace-loving people, and we all must affirm that the answer to killing cannot be more killing.

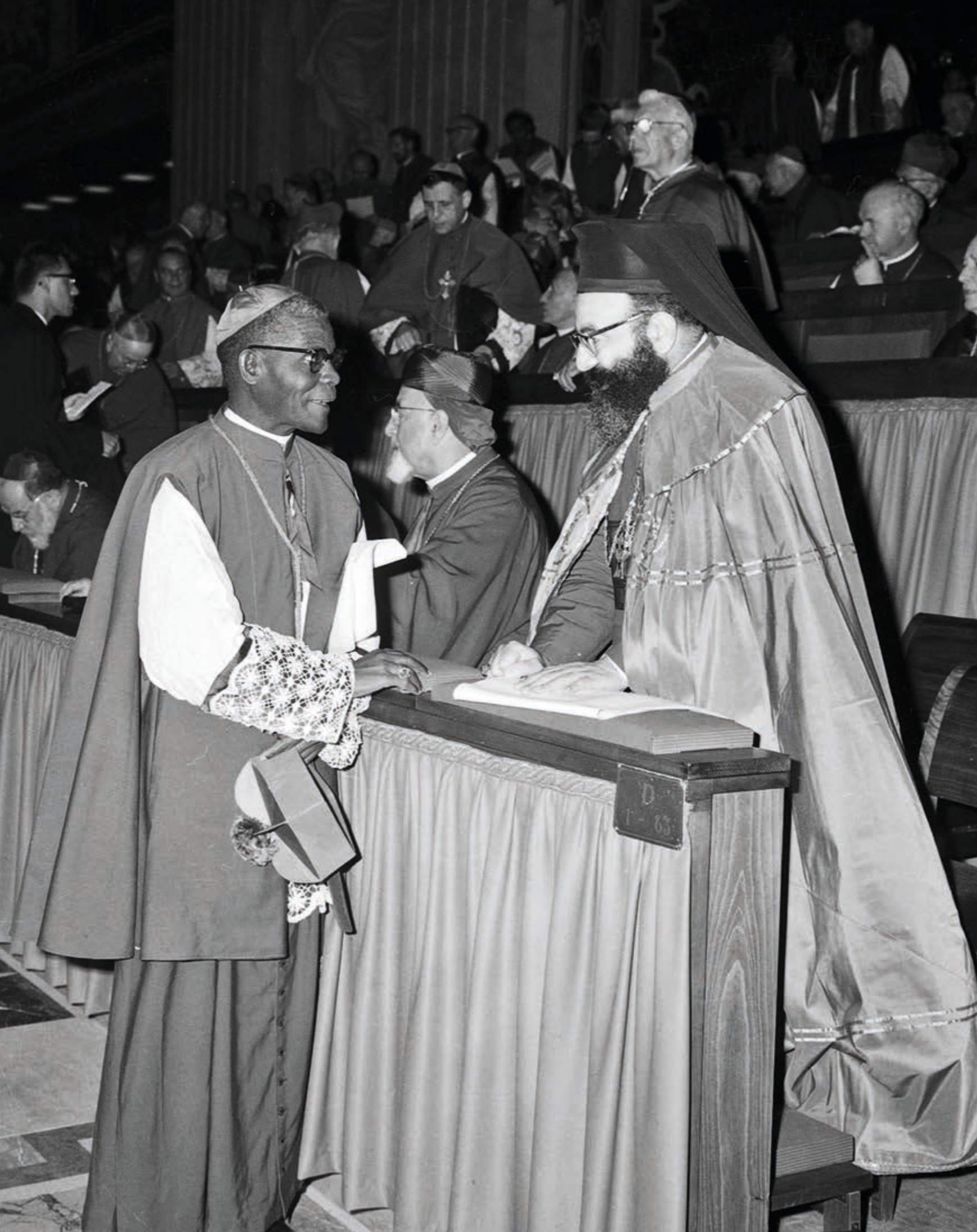
We must unite against violence in the name of religion. We all know that the vast majority of believers oppose violence. When we, the followers of all religions, and people of all cultures reject violence in the name of religion we defend our common humanity.

The sadness with which we view the recent events in Paris and in other parts of the world makes it very important for us to combine our efforts and to help refugees and others who need our help. We cannot continue with what is happening, so we must learn from each other.

There are so many things that we can say about killing and about violence, but I think that it's time to use the wisdom of religious people, religious leaders. I believe that they can help everywhere, whether it's in Syria, Iraq, the Middle East or in Europe. In the face of this violent extremism we can provide the voices of responsible religious leaders and peacemakers to offer up alternatives to ignorance and hatred.

Ladies and gentlemen, I look forward to a fruitful dialogue on *Nostra Aetate*, and to celebrate the ways in which the Declaration enables us to live in peace and cooperation in our time.

Thank you very much.



Opening remarks

His Eminence Cardinal Christoph Schönborn

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn has been Archbishop of Vienna since 1995 and Cardinal since 1998. He has been decorated with many medals and is a member of the European Academy of Sciences, the Congregation of the Faith, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, and the Congregation for Catholic Education. He is also a member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity and of the Council for Promoting the New Evangelization and a member of the Secretary of the Synod of Bishops.

Cardinal Schönborn holds multiple honorary doctorates and has authored numerous books.

Career summary

- ❖ 1963: Became a member of the Dominican Order
- ❖ Studied theology, philosophy and psychology at various universities including École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne
- ❖ 1970: Ordained a priest in Vienna
- ❖ 1974: Completed PhD in theology
- ❖ 1973–1975: Made chaplain in Graz
- ❖ 1975–1991: Professor of Dogmatic Theology and the Christian East at the Catholic Theological Faculty in Fribourg, Switzerland
- ❖ 1980: Member of the International Theological Commission of the Holy See
- ❖ 1987: Editorial Secretary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- ❖ 1991: Ordained Bishop at St. Stephan, Vienna
- ❖ 1995: Archbishop of Vienna and Metropolitan Bishop of the Viennese ecclesiastical province and Ordinarius for the Byzantine Rite faithful in Austria
- ❖ 1998: Became Cardinal.



*Cardinal Schönborn lecturing at a seminary,
Santiago, Chile*





our Eminences, Your Excellencies, dear Secretary-General, dear friends and, I dare to say, dear brothers and sisters.

The 50 years of *Nostra Aetate* have been a time of big change and of great opportunity. I can only say what the Declaration has done to the Catholic Church and I can try, in three short points, to summarise how this change in attitude was possible.

We are all aware of a difficult point, that religions generally maintain the pretension of being true religions. I will never forget my address to Imam Sadiq University in Tehran when I posed precisely this question to the students: “How can we have dialogue between religions when each religion pretends, in one way or another, to be the true religion? On the other hand, if we all decide to renounce this pretension, that would not only be difficult, it would simply be impossible because what we believe belongs to the innermost conviction of human life.”

Religious convictions are not something you change in the same way that you change your shirt from time to time. So, how can we have dialogue without renouncing truth? The situation becomes even more acute when we consider that most religions – not all, but most – have, in one way or another, a missionary appeal because we have the divine call to spread truth and justice through our belief and our life. So for us Christians, the words of the prophet Isaiah that, from Zion comes the command to law, these are holy words.

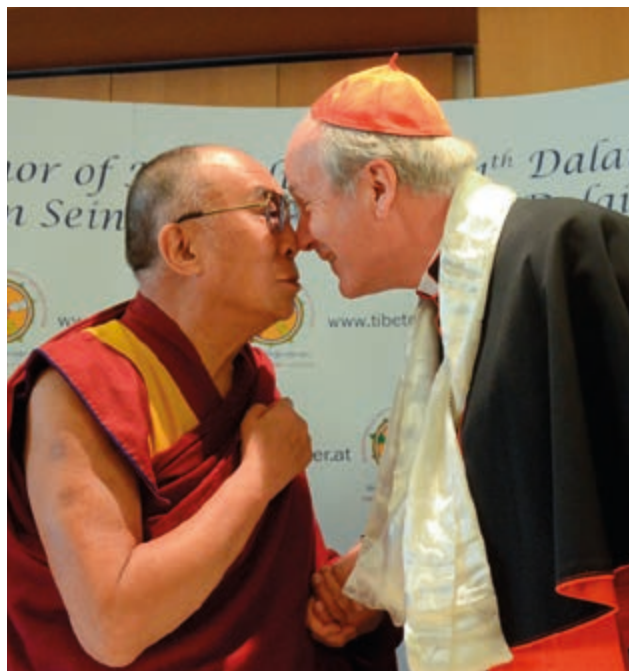
Jesus said: “Go out and make all nations my disciples and teach them all that I have taught.” And the Koran is the revelation that is considered by its followers to be the definitive revelation. So, for centuries it was very rare that real dialogue was possible between believers because everybody had the conviction that they were in the possession of truth and in the possession of the true way of life.

For centuries we have fought each other. Even among Christians – Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and other religious communities – there has been conflict about the true way of living one’s own religion. When I posed this dilemma so frankly to students in Tehran, I had to give them an answer to the question: “Why are we engaged in dialogue?” I found three reasons which are closely related to *Nostra Aetate* and I will support them here by quotes from the Vatican II declaration about the relation of the Catholic to non-Christian religions.

The first and very simple reason is that we are living

in one world, and this has become so obvious that we are now speaking about the global village. In a village, people have to live door-to-door, house-to-house, close to each other in the neighbourhood. So, for these very elementary reasons, we have to live together in peace; there is no other choice. Yes, there are other choices but we are all convinced that they are false as we have seen in these dramatic events in Paris and in so many similar events in Beirut, Baghdad, Africa, Asia and so many other places in the world. This is not the way – we have to live together.

But there is a fundamental reason which is common to religion, I think, all over the world. It is the conviction that humanity forms a family and that we are all created by God and, as *Nostra Aetate* says in the first article: “One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the Earth. One is also their final goal, as God is the destiny of all of us. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extends to all men, until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light.”



Cardinal Schönborn greeting the Dalai Lama in traditional Tibetan manner, Pentecost 2012, Vienna



*Cardinal Schönborn celebrating his twentieth year
as Archbishop of Vienna*

Humanity is but one family. This is the very simple and the first reason why dialogue is necessary because, neighbouring each other, we have to speak to one another and what we do here on a high academic level is what we are used to doing in our daily lives with our neighbours, whatever religion they may have.

The second reason is that in the human heart there is, all over the world in all humanity, a religious sense. Of course, some people deny the existence of the divine, and we have to respect their conscience and their conviction. But generally speaking, every human being has a religious sense, a sense of the divine and you can experience this sense when you observe people's religious behaviour. I will never forget when I saw for the first

time a Buddhist praying in their temple; when I entered a mosque for the first time and saw the prayer there. And as a child I learned more about my own religion by what I saw and heard from the faithful through their lives and through their acts as well as what I later studied in theological books.

So, we have to exchange stories about religious experience. And there are common features of religious experience all over the world – in all nations, in all human hearts you can find this spark of the divine which is the reason why religious experience is something we can share everywhere.

And there is a third reason which I think is the most challenging reason for dialogue. In many religions, we believe that we have, after this earthly life, to give account of it; that there will be a judgement about what we have done. Religion is unimaginable without responsibility and we can share this responsibility, the common

responsibility for the common good. I think that we will not be judged about our religion but about the question: “What did you do for the needs of justice in the world? What did you do for the hungry in the world? What did you do for the refugees, for the poor, the needy? What did you do for peace in the world? What have you done for the ecological needs of our planet?”

This is our common responsibility and about this common responsibility, we have not only to talk but to work together. And I again quote *Nostra Aetate* in its last article: “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: “He who does not love does not know God.”

My dear friends, these three reasons are, I think, sufficient to support the efforts of KAICIID in the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. We are all neighbours belonging to one human family. We are all gifted with a religious sense and, with our religious experiences, we can share, we can learn from each other and we can deepen in spirituality together. And finally, we have a common responsibility, and about this responsibility we have to talk and to work together.

Thank you.

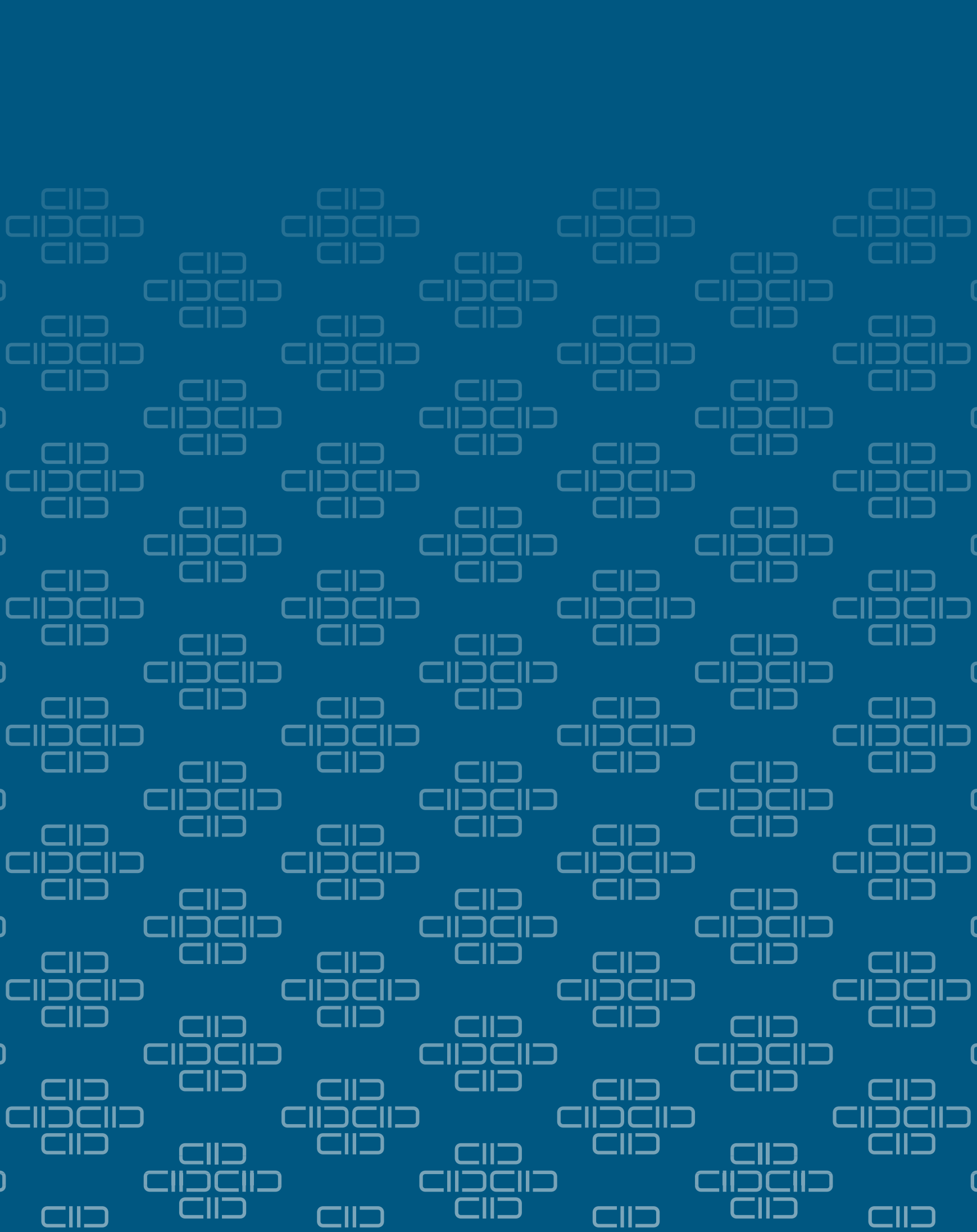


Cardinal Schönborn with copies of YOUCAT launched on World Youth Day, 2011 as an accessible, contemporary expression of the Catholic Faith



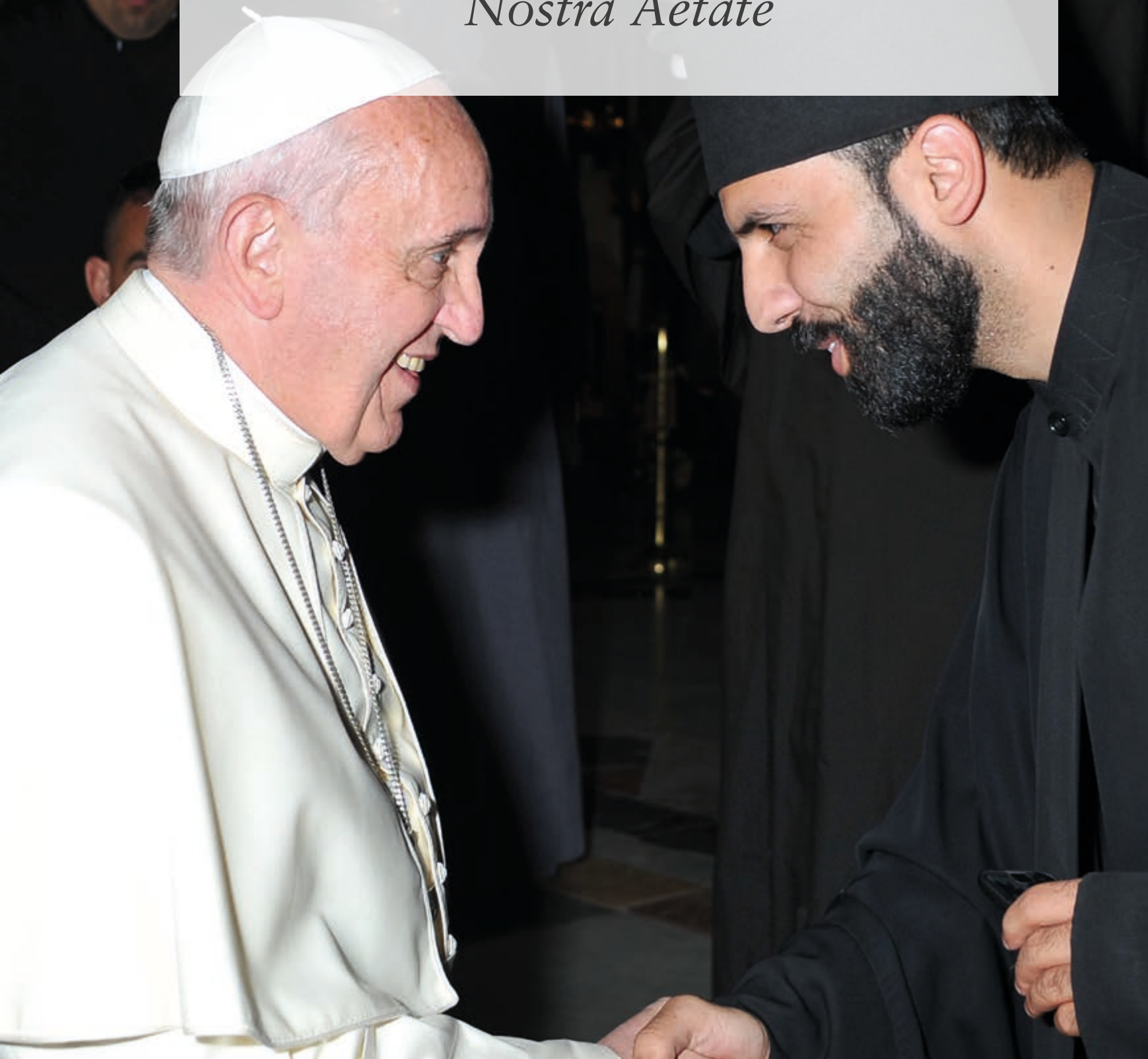
Above: Cardinal Schönborn attending a theatre performance of young people with disabilities, Santiago, Chile

Pictured top: pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Teresa of the Andes with the Community of the Lamb



Chapter II

Ecumenical perspectives of
Nostra Aetate





Introduction

Prof. Patrice Brodeur, Ph.D., KAICIID Senior Adviser

A Senior Adviser to KAICIID and Associate Professor at the Faculty of Theology and the Sciences of Religions at the University of Montreal, Prof. Brodeur has over thirty years of experience in the area of interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an academic researcher and educator as well as a practitioner.

An esteemed author and multilingualist, Prof. Brodeur has received numerous prestigious awards, including fellowships, scholarships, research grants and prizes during his distinguished career.

Career summary

- ❖ Second Master's Degree in Comparative Religion and Ph.D. in Islam and Judaism from Harvard University
- ❖ 2005: Won first prize in the Social Entrepreneurship Venture Plan competition at the University of Notre Dame Mendoza Business School
- ❖ Developed an interdisciplinary research team on Islam, pluralism and globalisation at the University of Montreal (Canada), focusing on past and present intra-religious and interreligious, as well as inter-civilisational and inter-worldview forms of dialogue
- ❖ 2010: Received an Inter-faith Visionary Award from the Temple of Understanding.



Prof. Brodeur during one of the training sessions at the KAICIID Fellows Programme



It is my pleasure to add my words of welcome to all of you today on the occasion of such an important commemorative event.

Celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* is an opportunity to take stock of how far we have progressed interreligiously over the last five decades, changing the course of history in a significant way, from competition over truth claims to sharing a dialogical path through which we discover together our many similarities and learn to respect, and even at times value, our differences.

Our three panels today bring together eminent practitioners of one form or another of intra-religious and interreligious dialogue. They will share their personal perspectives so as to shed light on this key conciliar document as well as the impact that it has had over the past five decades on dramatically improving both intra-Christian, or ecumenical, and interreligious dialogue, especially in terms of relations between Roman Catholics and Jews, since that particular bilateral dialogue was the initial framework out of which grew the broader and final version of *Nostra Aetate*.

This document represents what we would call today a paradigm shift for the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the radical change of theological perspective

regarding the Jewish people. It was also a catalyst that greatly improved intra-Christian and Christian-Muslim relations, as well as relations with people of other religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

Our first panel today gives space to ecumenical reactions to *Nostra Aetate* from three perspectives within the Christian family. His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel will give an Orthodox perspective on the impact of the document ecumenically within the Christian family, as well as in terms of interreligious relations.

Our second panellist is Prof. Dr. Susanne Heine, based here at the University of Vienna, who will share her Protestant point of view. Rev. Mark Poulson will then present an Anglican perspective. This first panel will end with a period of questions and answers.

Afterwards, the second panel will look at the impact of *Nostra Aetate* within the Abrahamic family, primarily from Jewish and Muslim perspectives. Finally, the third panel will broaden and look at the ways in which this document also had a major impact on bilateral relations with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism.

Prof. Brodeur discusses interreligious dialogue at a Sikh Gurdwara in Malaysia





Orthodox perspectives on ecumenical and interreligious relations after *Nostra Aetate*

His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel

His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel is Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

During his service to the Church, His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel has become an advocate for peace and dialogue.

Career summary

- ❖ Metropolitan of France, Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, election 2003
- ❖ Vice President of the Conference of the European Churches (CEC) and President of the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops of France
- ❖ Co-President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP)
- ❖ In charge of interreligious dialogue with Judaism and Islam on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.



© Daniel Shaked



His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel signing the KAICIID Affirmation at the Centre's inauguration ceremony, Hofburg Palace, Vienna, 2012



Your Excellency Apostolic Nuncio, Your Excellencies, Excellency Ambassador, members of the Diplomatic Corps, dear distinguished religious leaders, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to echo what has already been said about the events that we have lived through over the past few days in Paris. Yesterday the usually busy airport was almost empty and there was a palpable fear hanging over what is normally a lively city. These are attacks on civilisation by people who have no civilisation, attacks in the name of religion by people who have no religion. This thought urges us to contemplate the tragedy and to strengthen our hope in dialogue, civilisation and love.

Today we have come together to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. Listening to His Eminence the Cardinal earlier, I thought that this is an opportunity for love between nations, and that the removal of all racial and other discrimination is something very important to contribute to interreligious collaboration. And thereby to nations and to the triumph of good, freedom, and peace in the world, and for the well-being of contemporary people, independent of their religious traditions.

It is understood that this cooperation excludes all syncretism as well as any attempt on the part of any religion to impose itself on the others. For instance, in the various and diverse Orthodox Churches both Eastern and Oriental, there has been a long history of peaceful coexistence between Orthodox and other religions.

As Orthodox Christians we strongly believe that other religions should not be simply rejected as wrong, but considered in the perspective of their relation to the Logos Himself. As the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew once declared: “We should keep in mind that dialogue is more unbiased than debate, more honest than polite conversation, and more agreeable than discussion.”

We have to come to this view, not simply through an abstract theological, or even philosophical reflection, but rather through our long experience living next to or amongst people of different religions. In this way we can learn to approach other religions, not simply with an abstract or theoretical view, but from the point of view of their spirituality.

We, as religious leaders, have the mission through our intensive cooperation to promote, at a national and international level, the human dignity that we consider to be the very image of God.

I would like to conclude this modest address to you by quoting the first lines of *Nostra Aetate* that we commemorate today: “In our time when, day by day mankind is being drawn closer together and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely the relationship to non-Christian religions. In the task of promoting unity and love among people, and indeed among nations, we have to consider above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”

Thank you.



Above: His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel speaking at the European Media Forum on the universal human rights of freedom of religion and freedom of expression, 2015

Pictured top: high level Christian and Muslim leaders from the Middle East meeting to endorse the Athens Declaration, 2015



Nostra Aetate and lessons learned for broader interreligious relations

Univ. Prof. Em. Dr. Susanne Heine

Dr. Susanne Heine is University Professor Emeritus of Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion at the Protestant Theological Faculty, Vienna University.

Dr. Heine studied Protestant Theology and Philosophy in Vienna and Bonn after which she was ordained into the Lutheran ministry. For over 30 years she has been engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue, both nationally and internationally, with many publications to her name.

Career summary

- ❖ Assistant within the Department for New Testament Studies, Vienna University
- ❖ 1973: Doctor's degree in New Testament studies
- ❖ 1978: Post-doctoral thesis (Habilitation) in religious education
- ❖ 1982–1990: Associate Professor and Head of Department of Religious Education, Vienna University
- ❖ 1990–1996: Full Professor of Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion, Zürich University
- ❖ 1996–2010: Head of Department, Practical Theology and Psychology of Religion, Vienna University
- ❖ 1997–2006: Member of the Academic Senate, initiating and promoting Master studies in Islamic Religious Education
- ❖ 2007: Awarded the Wilhelm Hartel Prize by the Austrian Academy of Sciences
- ❖ 2011: Awarded the Honorary Cross for Science and Art, first class, by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture.



Dr. Heine with colleagues at the Offene Dialogveranstaltung in Vienna



Dear colleagues, dear honourable representatives, ladies and gentlemen.
How was it possible that a council such as Vatican II could be created?

It was in the aftermath of two world wars that the constitution of democratic states, by law, established and confirmed religious freedom. The 1960s were a time of opening up and of making a kind of shift from religious controversies to social coherence. And with this coherence came a responsibility – an important responsibility – in which religions and the Churches could engage.

Vatican II looked towards a renewal of the Roman Catholic Church from its origin – this renewal was a kind of motto recovered from its roots – and two documents were presented to the world outside the Catholic Church. One of those documents was the decree on ecumenism called *Unitatis Redintegratio*, addressing the Protestant Churches, and many prominent Protestant representatives were invited to Vatican II as observers and also to comment on the draft papers. This engagement was completely new.

It was in 1928 that Pope Pius XI forbade Roman Catholics to take part in any ecumenical conference, but this new document on ecumenism was published only 37 years later. This was a huge step.

The other document was *Nostra Aetate* which addresses two important aspects. Firstly, the increase in pluralism which enables people of various beliefs to live together in one world. Secondly, and especially with respect to Muslims, the document mentions that, over centuries, Christian-Muslim relations became spoilt by militant encounters resulting in harsh polemics and vilification on both sides. The decree invites us “to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding, and to preserve as well as promote together for the benefit of all mankind, social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom”. These last words stress a focus on the socio-political situation.

I would also like to say that today we should not only forget the challenges of the past, but we should avoid focusing our minds on terrorism. *Nostra Aetate* speaks for social justice, moral welfare, peace and freedom. In the light of Roman Catholic self-understanding I think that this is important in emphasising the responsibility of the Church and in stressing those traits common to all religions. And I read this as a difference in relation, or a relation in difference, as both go together. And this,

for me, is the lasting impact of Vatican II for the future.

Some critical voices within the Roman Catholic Church desired that the *Nostra Aetate* declaration should include a reference to both Islam as an established religion and to the prophet Muhammad. But I think that it was a wise decision, instead, to reference persons – not institutions but individual followers – who are responsible for a religion from their own religious perspective, for example from the point of view of a Jewish or a Muslim life.

So Vatican II addresses the person responsible and not the religion or the institution. This is expressed as: “The Church exhorts her sons that through dialogue and through collaboration with the followers of other religions carried out with prudence and love, and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognise, preserve and promote the good things; spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found amongst these men.”

This shows that Vatican II did not, at the core, intend religious dialogue, but to come to an understanding on a socio-political level by searching for the relevant potential within one’s own religion. The following four points are prominent within the Declaration:

- ❖ All human beings are created by God. The document says that we cannot truly call on God the Father of all if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man who was created in the image of God
- ❖ God bestowed all human beings with dignity which cannot be lost
- ❖ The merciful God wants salvation for His whole creation and for all creatures
- ❖ Humans are called into responsibility for this creation and earth.

The document goes on to say that: “The Church reproves as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men, or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, the Sacred Synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to maintain good fellowship among the nations.” Also to follow quotations from Paul’s letter to the Romans and the Gospel according to Matthew such that the faithful should strive, “if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven”.

Vatican II created a lasting impetus for a multitude of dialogue forums. The World Council of Churches, which hosts 345 churches including Protestant and Orthodox, became involved together with the Roman Catholic Church with its observer status. These ecumenical discussions informed the joint declaration dated 1999. The paper entitled *Christians Meeting Muslims* published by the Council in 1977 records the results of a ten-year-long process of dialogue.

Very important for the Protestant Churches is also the statement made in *Nostra Aetate* about the Jews and the Church's relationship to the Jews. The document points out that the Passion and the death of Christ "cannot be charged against all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today" and "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone". From the 1960s, this view was adopted by many Protestant Churches which confessed to having been guilty of anti-Judaism for centuries, initiating the building of new relations with the Jews and Jewish communities.



As a Protestant theologian I'm aware that the Roman Catholic Church did not drop its official teaching, but stuck to the idea of the Roman Catholic Church as being the only way to the fullness of salvation. The documents including *Nostra Aetate* can be read by Roman Catholics and others either from this closer aspect, or from a more open perspective.

Within the scope of what was possible at that time, Vatican II was a milestone. It was the highly important beginning of the fostering of mutual understanding and peace-building, and had a very broad political impact worldwide. Much was accomplished in that there began ecumenical cooperation between the Protestant Churches on the basis of religious communities as well as in scholarly work. There was also a renewal of relations between Christians and Jews in addition to a new perspective on Christian-Muslim relations.

I personally do very much regret that terrorist acts are currently mobilising all souls who make religions in general responsible for violence and warfare, and who demand once more to eliminate all religious statements from public discourse.

For instance, the Swiss broadcasting company RTS recently cancelled all of its religious magazine programmes. But I think that the contrary should hold sway, with our support for – and enlargement of – religious programmes for the purpose of offering information and religious edification, and documenting the various approaches within and between the religions in order not to allow a particular group, or certain fundamentalists groups, to monopolise communications with their one-sided, narrow views.

Vatican II is, for me, a best-practice example that should be continuously updated. And I think that it's necessary to deploy these best-practice examples, not only against terrorist actions but towards bringing interreligious understanding and dialogue to the public through all kinds of media. Sometimes it seems that we collectively take backward steps but, with what happened in the 1960s and the progress made since then, I am really convinced that these efforts will not be in vain.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Heine speaking at the international congress for Interreligiöse Seelsorge at the University of Bern





Anglican responses to *Nostra Aetate*

Rev. Mark Poulson

Rev. Mark Poulson is Secretary for Interreligious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury and National Interreligious Affairs Adviser for the Church of England. He lives and works among various faiths and communities in an extraordinarily diverse area of London. Rev. Poulson has been instrumental in fostering the flourishing relationships between those faiths and communities.

Career summary

- ❖ 2003: Became Vicar of St John's Church, Southall, UK
- ❖ 2014: Appointed Secretary for Interreligious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the National Advisor for Interreligious Affairs to the Church of England
- ❖ Long-standing member of the Church of England's Presence and Engagement Programme task group
- ❖ Sits on the board of the Near Neighbours Project – the Church of England's successful partnership with the UK Government.





In the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* may I greet you equally, sisters and brothers – an Anglican response to *Nostra Aetate*.

All of us engaged in interreligious life and discourse live in the slipstream of the ground-breaking seminal declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, setting a framework for engagement and relationship borne by our common humanity. It reminds the Church of its primary vocation to worship the one God, and to witness and attest to this before the world and every single person, all of whom are, we believe, children of God created uniquely in God's own image.

The recognition that there is nobility of desire, truth and holiness in both Hinduism and Buddhism, offers us a template for engagement. If we can recognise the fidelity and integrity of those seeking God from within their own faith traditions, we can move with integrity towards a theology of dialogue and understanding.

As Anglicans, this is manifest in a commitment to bilateral and multilateral relationships which have borne rich fruit of academic discussion of the extent of common theological ground through scriptural reasoning.

This commitment has also been evident in the recent Anglican Church and UK Government initiative called "Near Neighbours", whereby a small grants fund has been made available to act as the catalyst for grass roots projects of social transformation through some of the most deprived and divided communities in England. The granting of funds for these projects is dependent on them being initiated by groups of people from different faith backgrounds with the purpose of engaging people of those various backgrounds.

This initiative has been academically scrutinised and has contributed significantly to the integration of fragile communities after the trauma of the widespread rioting of 2001 and the bombings of 2005 in London which led to exhaustive inquiries into the dangers of an unintegrated society.

There is also something understated but unapologetic in the call for both Christians and Muslims to draw a line under the past, and to focus our energies on the work of mutual understanding, social justice, moral welfare, peace and freedom. This call for radical discontinuity in the competitive history of Christianity and Islam steers us towards a more hopeful path where our differences can be faced honestly and non-defensively.

The Christian Muslim Forum initiated by the

Archbishop of Canterbury in the United Kingdom, has made considerable headway in facilitating conversations between people of the two faiths, which do not deny the very real theological differences between us, but do acknowledge our mutual right to not only coexist but to thrive and flourish in a democratic and secular society.

The heart of the declaration is in the clarion call for a clear, biblically based recognition of the shared scriptural history of Judaism and Christianity and the grave scriptural error of Christians in supersessionism and replacement theology.

The declaration also recognises Christian complicity in contributing towards anti-Semitism. In the United Kingdom, the Council of Christians and Jews has engaged with this legacy and has produced ground-breaking reports, works on anti-Semitism, and shared conversations in both the religious and political arenas.

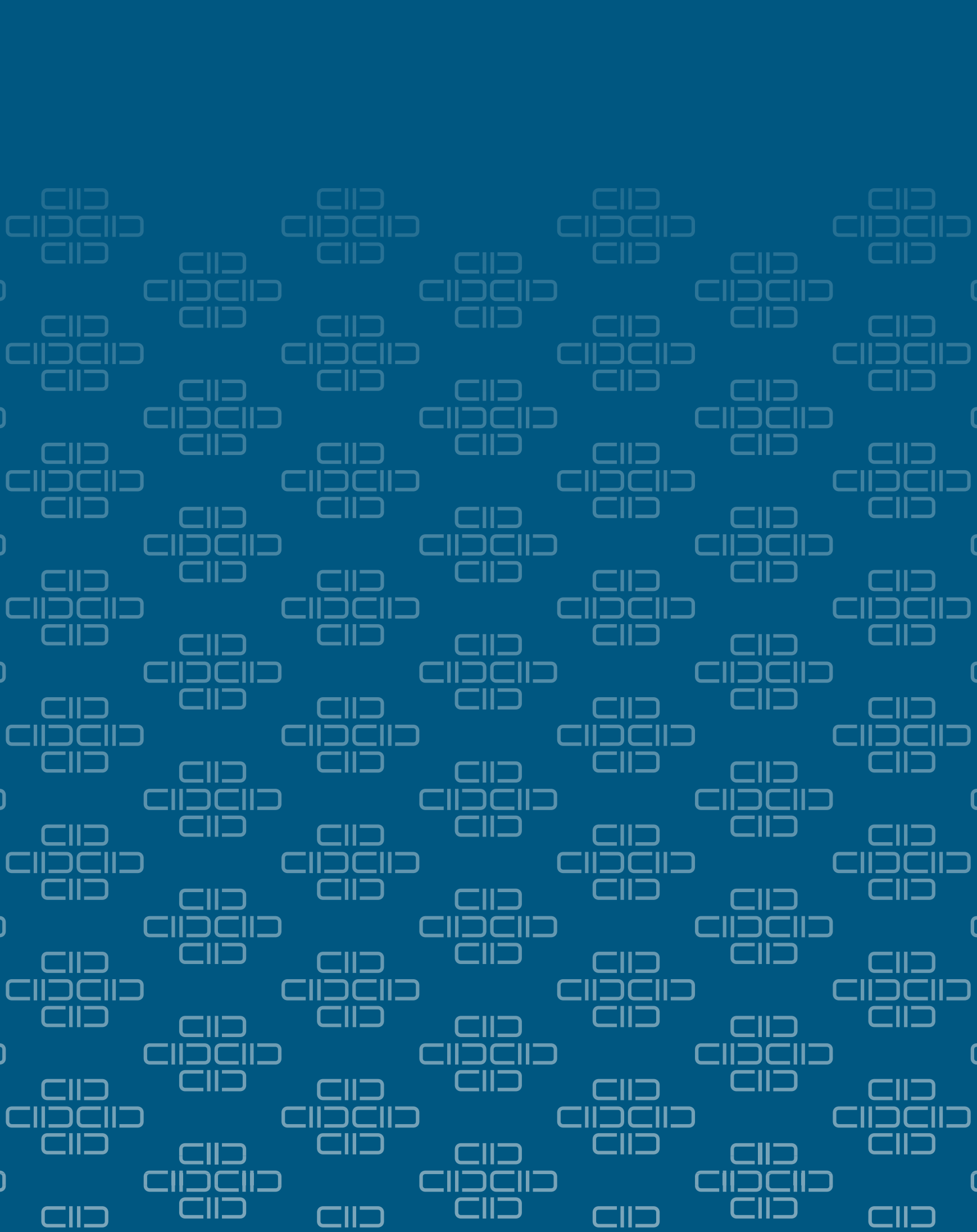
The most recent publication, *If Not Now, When?* is a stunning piece of work which I would highly recommend to you. It is a Jewish resource used throughout synagogues in the United Kingdom to inform the community about the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. It is an exemplar of the fruit of dialogue.

Nostra Aetate concludes with a definitive reminder of the inherent rights and God-given dignity of every human being. But it goes further in prescribing discrimination of anyone, irrespective of their identity or creed, as being antithetical to the claim of Christian understanding, witness or discipleship. We are all enriched by this declaration, and are still attempting to live out its challenges within the Church of England too.

Thank you very much.



Rev. Mark Poulson with the Archbishop of Canterbury during his visit to St. John's Parish in Southall



Chapter III

Nostra Aetate and the religions
of Abraham





Introduction

Prof. Mohammed Abu-Nimer, KAICIID Senior Adviser

Mohammed Abu-Nimer is Professor at the School of International Service, American University. He is also Senior Adviser to KAICIID. He has conducted interreligious conflict resolution training and inter-faith dialogue workshops in conflict areas around the world including Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Chad, Niger, Iraq (Kurdistan), Philippines (Mindanao), and Sri Lanka.

Prof. Abu-Nimer is the author of numerous articles and books.

Career summary

- ❖ 1999–2013: Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute – part of the International Peace and Conflict Resolution program
- ❖ Founded the Salam Institute for Peace and Justice, an organisation that focuses on capacity building, civic education, and intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue
- ❖ Co-founder and co-editor of the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*.



Prof. Abu-Nimer speaking at the graduation of the first students of the KAICIID International Fellows Programme



Fifty years ago on 28 October 1965, Pope Paul VI declared in *Nostra Aetate* the Roman Catholic Church’s principal consideration of “what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship”.

The first panel in our discussions today sets the basis for this event by discussing ecumenical reactions to *Nostra Aetate*. This panel expands from an intra-Christian perspective to look at the religions of the Abrahamic tradition and their relationship to *Nostra Aetate*. The Declaration itself makes evident the distinct ties held among Christianity, Islam and Judaism – the patrimony that Christianity shares with Judaism and the Muslim recognition of Jesus as a prophet and Mary as His mother, not to mention the shared belief of one God in all three traditions.

Before turning to the first speaker, I would like to reiterate the emphasis on commonality and fellowship, and their basis within the call to dialogue in the 1965 declaration, as integral building blocks to interreligious dialogue in general and, in accordance with the theme of this panel, among the Abrahamic traditions today.

The four core dialogical principles discussed in this panel contain these building blocks. The first principle aims to see things from the perspective of the other. The second emphasises the focus on the common humanity that ties all of us together. Humanity is in the centre of existence and not vice versa. Thirdly, there is a need for self-examination of one’s own relationship with God and with others surrounding Him. Fourthly, although many people are concerned about inter-faith dialogue since they are afraid of losing their own faith or of becoming less faithful when they participate in interreligious dialogue, this very dialogue can in fact strengthen one’s own faith in the process of learning about the faith of others.

This panel addresses some topics perhaps unthinkable in 1965 and, although we should not downplay the sensitivity of such discussions today, it is a reminder of how far we have come in the last 50 years.

Firstly, Dr. Mohammad Sammak will begin with what Muslims can learn from *Nostra Aetate*. We then pass the floor to Dr. Seyyed Ata’ollah Mohajerani who will discuss the importance of theology in interreligious relations. Then Chief Rabbi Rosen will share with us thoughts on Jewish-Christian Relations since *Nostra Aetate*. Lastly, Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel will close this panel by discussing Living Dialogue among the Abrahamic Faiths.



Above: at the National Dialogue Conference, Helsinki in 2015, Prof. Abu-Nimer outlines the role of KAICIID in supporting peacemakers at grassroots level

Pictured top: Prof. Abu-Nimer at the Union for the Mediterranean forum, 2015, explaining the growing importance of interreligious dialogue in the Mediterranean region



What can Muslims learn from *Nostra Aetate*?

Dr. Mohammad Sammak

Dr. Mohammad Sammak is Secretary General of the National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue.

For Dr. Sammak, dialogue is a way of life. It is the culture of building bridges between peoples of different religions and cultures, and the art of searching for the truth from within the point of view of the other.

Career summary

- ❖ Secretary General of Lebanon's National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue
- ❖ Secretary General of the Islamic Spiritual Summit (Sunnit-Shiit-Druze-Alawite) in Lebanon
- ❖ Secretary of the Arab Group for Christian-Muslim Dialogue
- ❖ Member of the Board of Presidents of the World Conference of Religions for Peace – New York
- ❖ Writer and political commentator for prominent newspapers such as Al-Ittihad (Abu Dhabi) and Al-Mustaqbal (Beirut), and author of 30 books.



Pope Benedict XVI conferring upon Dr. Sammak a medal after his presentation to the Synod of the Middle East, 2010



Before answering – or trying to answer – the question as to what Muslims can learn from *Nostra Aetate*, it is useful to answer two preliminary questions:

- ❖ What, in the Muslim world, is wrong with learning from others?
- ❖ What is right within *Nostra Aetate* from which Muslims can learn?

These questions are interconnected. On the one hand, one-third of the 1.6 billion Muslims – that is about 600 million of them – live in non-Islamic countries and societies; and two-thirds of the 2.2 billion Christians live in the Third World, specifically in Africa and Asia where Islam is prevalent. This physical inter-connectedness implies the necessity for a mutual acceptance, respect, and cooperation. The main gate for this is a mutual understanding, and *Nostra Aetate* itself is a significant source for this understanding, as I'll show later.

I have to admit that, yes there is something wrong in the Islamic world. This world is very rich in natural resources, yet its peoples are very poor and unsettled. The highest percentage of refugees and displaced peoples in the world is of Muslims.

Tensions are high within Muslims of different confessions (Sunni & Shia) and between Muslims and non-Muslims. For instance, between:

- ❖ Muslims and Hindus in India and Sri Lanka
- ❖ Muslims and Buddhists in China, Thailand and Myanmar
- ❖ Muslims and Christian Orthodox in Russia
- ❖ Muslims and Christian Catholics in Europe
- ❖ Muslims and Christian Protestants in the USA
- ❖ Muslims and Jews in Israel and beyond
- ❖ Muslims and other different believers – the Izidis of Iraq in particular.

All of these negative features require a courageous reconsideration and revaluation of the current situation in the Islamic world.

The process of reconsideration requires firstly the admission, even the confession, that there is a major problem. And that it is not necessarily true that others are responsible for that problem, but that Muslims themselves are. That it is not useful anymore to avoid

self-criticism and seek refuge under the umbrella of a “foreign conspiracy theory against Islam,” but to blame ourselves as Muslims, in the first place.

We Muslims, have to admit that we are facing a real and existential problem. The act of defining this problem – or any other problem – goes a long way to being able to solve it; to paraphrase Albert Einstein.

Now the question is: who has the legitimate authority to define the problem? And who has the wisdom to outline the solution? And who has the courage to admit that Muslims should learn from other constructive experiences like *Nostra Aetate*?

Now, before talking about *Nostra Aetate*, and what and how to learn from it, let me tell you a short story of a great man who made history. The man is Angelo Roncalli. Angelo was a soldier in the Italian army during WWI. In the battlefield he saw how millions were killed by every means, even by poisonous gas. He was shocked by the experience and became sick. After the war he joined the clergy to find spiritual refuge, and was appointed to the Vatican Embassy, first in Greece then in Bulgaria where he became acquainted with Christian Orthodoxy, and in Ankara where he was introduced to Muslims. After WW2 he became Bishop and appointed the Vatican's Ambassador to France, where communism, secularism, and the leftist movements were then at their peak.

Roncalli then became a cardinal and, on 28 October 1958, he was elected Pope, adopting the name John XXIII. Pope John XXIII carried with him to the papacy his experiences and encounters both in war and peace. On 25 January 1959, and for the first time in the history of the Vatican, he addressed a message to the UN – that is to all nations of different religions, cultures and ethnicities – in which he said: “Peace on earth is an object of profound desire for humanity.”

He confirmed in his message, the four principles necessary to achieve peace for humanity: truth, justice, solidarity, and liberty.

At that time, the Catholic church considered communism to be anti-Christian – an influence from Pope Pius XII. But Pope John XXIII received into the Holy See the son-in-law of the Soviet President at that time, Nikita Khrushchev.

This is the short story of the Pope who called for Vatican II, but who passed away on 3 June 1963, two years before it concluded the meetings which culminated in *Nostra Aetate* on 18 December 1965 with the

participation of 2,450 bishops from all over the world.

Nostra Aetate cancelled – and turned the page on – all previous religious laws made against the bishops of Constantinople which led, in 1054, to the great divide between the two churches of Rome and Istanbul.

The ecumenical dialogue initiated by *Nostra Aetate* reconciled the Evangelical and Orthodox churches. It also opened the door of the Church to the secularist Christians to participate in its activities. And now Pope Francis is opening more doors.

Nostra Aetate withdrew the Church's old verdict that condemns all Jews until the end of time for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. So this document has become the *Magna Carta* of Christian-Jewish relations.

Nostra Aetate declared that Muslims are believers in one God and that Muslims respect Jesus and His mother The Virgin Mary. And, although they don't believe in Him as God, they do believe that he is a prophet; that God will judge between all peoples on the Day After; and that God is to be worshipped especially by prayer, charity and fasting. Hence, "differences with them is a sin."

After Vatican II and on the basis of these new

Christian Principles stated in *Nostra Aetate*, Popes John VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have addressed Muslims as "brothers".

These are the lessons that Muslims in the 21st century are supposed to learn from. But we cannot learn if we do not realise that we need to learn. And we cannot realise the need to learn if we do not feel that we are wrong somewhere. And we cannot have the feeling of being wrong if we are not courageous enough to practice self-criticism. After that, we need to be exceptionally courageous to admit that we have to learn from one another's experiences, especially if that other is an outsider to our spiritual and doctrinal system.

Now before suggesting how we can learn, let me underline the following important point:

Contrary to what extremists like ISIS are doing in the Middle East, and to the Middle East, Christians are described in the Holy Koran as believers in God, and are nearest to Muslims. Their clergy is praised in the Koran for being humble, although in principle there is no clergy in Islam itself (الرهبانية) as prophet Muhammad clearly declared. That is why there is no religious state in Islam, run by the clergy who are not there – or who are supposed not to be there – in the first place.

Now for us Muslims, to follow the example of Vatican II as stated in *Nostra Aetate*, we need a religious leader with the qualifications of Pope John XXIII who believes in humanity as one family and who respects and believes in all religions. I am sure that we have many possible leaders, because this is exactly what Islam teaches. After all, to be a Muslim is to believe in all messages from God, and in all His messengers – those who are mentioned in the Holy Koran and those who are not.

To believe in Islam is also to believe in human plurality, and in human differences as a manifestation of the glory of God. But to my humble knowledge, I don't know who has the moral and the religious authority that Pope John XXIII had to bring together 2,450 Muslim scholars and Imams from all over the Islamic world and to convince them to keep their meetings and discussions going until they come to a unified, 21st century



Dr. Sammak lecturing at the Islamic Centre in Rome with the late Imam Sheikh Mohamed Mehdi-Shamsuddine, President of the Islamic Shiete Council in Lebanon



interpretation of Islamic principles that deal with contemporary human challenges.

This is not to underestimate the many courageous attempts that Muslims have taken so far. For instance:

- ❖ The Al-Azhar four documents about human liberty and national state
- ❖ The Makah's principles against extremism and terror
- ❖ The Beirut Declaration on religious freedom
- ❖ The Marrakesh declaration on the rights of non-Muslim minorities in Islam.

These are initiatives that I have been part of, and directly involved in as a KAICIID Board Member. The question is how to bring together all of these scattered initiatives to form a snowball and push it down the hill.

The war against the kind of extremism and terrorism

Dr. Sammak with the ex-Secretary General of the OIC in Jeddah, Dr. Ikmaledine Oglow

that are committed in the name of Islam is an Islamic war because it is an Islamic responsibility in the first place. There are many soldiers who stand up courageously against the imposition of odd erroneous ideas, and misinterpretations of Islamic doctrine. They know that it is a long and costly war that cannot be won by military means alone. But at the same time, some Christians are also waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Some Muslims are waiting for the re-emergence of Al-Mehdi. Others are dreaming of a “caliphate” to be like a “city on the hill”.

I am more humble – I am looking for a Muslim Angelo Roncalli.



The importance of theology in interreligious relations

Dr. Seyyed Ata'ollah Mohajerani

Dr. Seyyed Ata'ollah Mohajerani is a religious researcher and writer.

Dr. Mohajerani finds that recognising otherness is the first step to achieving our goals. He has a distinguished career as a historian, politician, novelist and author in the field of dialogue. He believes that dialogue is a bridge to bring human beings closer to each other.

Career summary

- ❖ Prolific author of many books in the field of dialogue
- ❖ Lecturer and Academic Member of Tarbiat Modarres University, Tehran
- ❖ Member of the High Council of the National Commission for UNESCO in Iran
- ❖ 1996–2000: Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in the Cabinet of President Khatami
- ❖ 2000–2003: Head of the Centre of Dialogue among Civilisations
- ❖ Bachelor of Arts degree, Esfahan University; Master of Arts in History and Iranian Culture, Shiraz University; PhD in the history of Islam, Tarbiat Modarres University.



Dr. Mohajerani greeting Pope Francis at the Third Christian-Muslim Summit of Religious Leaders and Scholars, held in Rome in 2014





When I left politics in 2003 I began to read all of the holy texts – the Avesta, Upanishads, Gita, Old Testament, New Testament, and finally the Koran. I also read some interpretations of the Bible and the Koran. Consequently, it occurred to me ask an important question: What is the single, best verse in all of the holy books? My answer would be framed by the idea that the verse should define:

- ❖ Myself
- ❖ The relation between me and others
- ❖ The relation between me and the text
- ❖ The relation between God and me
- ❖ The relation between existence and me.

I felt the effort of finding this single, remarkable verse to be an enormous privilege because it encouraged me to read every text with a sense and belief of the believers of the text. This was a great lesson.

The clergyman in our village told me 50 years ago that I should read the Old Testament like a Jew, the New Testament like a Christian, and he recited to me a poem by Rumi. I invite you to recall T.S. Eliot's exquisite phrase in which he says: "The purpose of literature is to turn blood into ink." The main source of this phrase is Rumi but, of course, accurate translation is impossible. Rumi says: "When my blood is moving through my veins or flourishing in my heart, I paint the blood by poem."

If I were as Moses, I should be a perfect Jew, and if I were as Jesus, I would be a perfect Christian. I think that this idea is the essence of a new theology that we are longing for in this crucial time.

Coming back to my task of finding the best or most suitable verse to act as the basis of a new theology, I found it in the New Testament, in Mark, 2:28 where Jesus speaks to the Pharisees: "Jesus said to them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

I think that these glorious words of Jesus Christ have the capability of being a cornerstone of a new theology.

I think that "the Pharisees" in this context is a metaphor for all clergymen, Rabbis, Ayatollahs, Sheikhs, Cardinals, Bishops, Monks, Gurus, etc. The root of this term should be taken into consideration – "Pharisee" is derived from ancient Greek *Pharisaïos*, and from Aramaic *Pərīšā*, meaning "set apart, separated". I also think that the Sabbath in this context is a metaphor for all religions throughout the history of humankind.

The message is profound and obvious – that clergymen and religions are for man, not the other way around.

Let me borrow a thought-provoking German term to explain my view about theology. The word *Gestalt* in the German language is untranslatable, especially when found in philosophical texts. *Gestalt* does not mean simply shape or structure, it means deep structure.

For example, an Omega watch has 115 pieces. The watchmaker uses all of the pieces, putting every one in its special place, relating every piece to each of the others. Deep structure is evident at the moment that the watch begins to tick. Without the tick, or without all of the pieces working together, we have the shape of a watch, we even have the structure of a watch, but we do not have a watch. So, without the watch's deep structure – its real nature, the sound of its soul, the managing of the seconds, the vital watch-ology, if you like – we cannot manage our time or our life.

By this I mean that theology should be for the benefit of the people. Secondly it should be understandable.

At the beginning of Karl Rahner's book, *I Remember: An Autobiographical Interview with Meinhold Krauss*, he creates a caricature of a theologian delivering a speech during which Jesus Christ, sitting among the audience,



Dr. Mohajerani speaks at KAICIID's inauguration in Vienna, Austria on November 16, 2012



Dr. Mohajerani greets Rev. Charles Gibbs at the Parliament of the World's Religions, Salt Lake City, 2015

looks at the theologian and says: “I don’t understand.” Why does Jesus Christ not understand?

In the history of Islamic Philosophy, the texts of Mirdamad – the master and teacher of Sadroddin Shirazi, the great Iranian theologian, philosopher and mystic – are also very complicated and infinitely far from understanding. On the first night after he passed away, one of them asked Mirdamad: “Who is your God?” He replied: “Ostoghossan fogh al ostoghssat.” Ostoghoss is originally a Greek word Stikion or stikos, meaning the identity of everything in the last station of our knowledge and research.

The angel did not understand the word, so she went to ask Almighty God. But the Almighty told her: “Do not worry, when Mirdamad was alive I did not understand his language at all.”

We have a verse in the Holy Koran, 54:17:

“قال تعالى: { وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ }

This verse, meaning “and we have indeed made the Koran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any that can deny this?” is repeated four times in chapter 54.

It is said that the theology of Karl Rahner begins where and when traditional theology ends.

In the new theology, we need to focus on two pillars. Firstly, that the centre of theology is for the benefit of man, and secondly that theology should be understandable and readable by the people. These two elements shed

light on each other, and offer a context of relevance for each other.

I think, as Buddha says in the *Book of the Twos*, that we need liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom. When I say “mind” in this context, it refers to an old theology. In that theology, based on Martin Buber’s epoch-making book, *I and Thou*, we are talking about the God. Our relation with Him is the relation between I and He. There is a huge gap between us.

When I say “liberation by wisdom”, I mean a new theology, which defines the relation between me and the God as: I and you.

What is wisdom such that it can be a roadmap for this new theology? I mean the wisdom that the prophet Solomon asked Almighty God, Jehovah:

ל - - נְתַן־עֵדֶיךָ יְיָ הַמְּכִתָּה הַיְתִיעַ

“Grant me knowledge and wisdom” (2 Chronicles 1:10). Wisdom is knowledge plus light. Light is definitely love to the human being. The value of a human being in every scripture or holy text – jurisprudence – is the criterion by which we can know which theology is important to interreligious relations.





Jewish-Christian relations since *Nostra Aetate*

Chief Rabbi David Rosen

Chief Rabbi David Rosen is International Director of Interreligious Affairs at the American Jewish Committee (AJC).

David Rosen was Chief Rabbi of Ireland and Senior Rabbi of the largest Orthodox Jewish congregation in South Africa. Today he is one of the most prominent Jewish leaders in the field of interreligious affairs.

Career summary

- ❖ International Director of Interreligious Affairs of AJC and its Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding
- ❖ Past Chairman of IJCIC, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations
- ❖ Honorary Advisor on Inter-faith Relations to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel
- ❖ International President of Religions for Peace
- ❖ Honorary President of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ)
- ❖ Knighted by the Vatican in 2005 as Commander of the Order of Gregory the Great. Decorated CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in 2010 by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II.



Rabbi David Rosen at the AJC & TAU sponsored conference celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate, December 2015



Logically – as I hope you will see in a moment if this is not familiar to you – I should have actually started before the other speakers.

Why? Because the origins of *Nostra Aetate* did not come from a desire of the bishops of the Second Vatican Council to address the relationship between the Church and world faiths. The origins of *Nostra Aetate* are the result of Pope John XXIII, Angelo Roncalli – to whom Dr. Sammak referred at length – and his charge to Cardinal Augustin Bea to address the relationship of the Church with the Jewish people, de Iudaeis. Why?

This was overwhelmingly the result of the impact of the Shoah, the holocaust. The holocaust was overwhelmingly a Jewish tragedy but it was substantially a Christian scandal. Why was it a Christian scandal? Because it was perpetrated by overwhelmingly baptised Christians in ostensibly Christian lands.

Of course the Shoah was, as Pope Benedict XVI has described it, a pagan enterprise, but it could not have succeeded to the degree it did with the extermination of six million Jews if the land had not been tilled, over centuries, with what was called “the teaching of contempt”.

The teaching of contempt had been the predominant attitude within the Christian world that said that the Jews were rejected by God, indeed even cursed by God, condemned to wander. Indeed they were the enemies of God and therefore in league with the devil. They were diabolical and therefore, they deserved everything they got. That kind of theology created the sense of dehumanisation of the Jew that facilitated the enormity of the tragedy.

Now, in the context of those tragedies there were remarkable individuals. Angelo Roncalli was one of those most outstanding, saintly people who was not only one of the first to know of the Nazi extermination machine, but also saved thousands when he was the Legate in Turkey – to which Dr. Sammak has referred – and this moved him deeply. And therefore, when he convened this *Aggiornamento* – this updating of the Church as Father Neuhaus so beautifully recalled in the film we just saw: “Open up the windows, let the air in, let the light in” – one of the things he wanted to address was precisely the relationship with the Jewish people.

His famous meeting with the great French Jewish historian Jules Isaac confirmed that determination. He gave the task to Cardinal Bea but there was opposition to this desire of the Church to change its attitude towards the

Jews. And the opposition not only came from the arch conservative elements who believed that the Jews really were condemned and did not want to let them off the hook; but it was also rejected, and fearfully, by bishops within the Muslim world who were wary that this would be seen as a political statement on the situation in the Middle East.

It was also opposed by those in the Far East from lands where Jews did not even feature on the radar screen. Why were they so obsessed with the Jews? What about our relationship with Hindus? What about our relationship with Buddhists?

So, there is a fascinating irony here. *Nostra Aetate* reflects the desire of elements within the Church, above all John XXIII and Cardinal Bea, to address their relationship to the Jewish people, but it was only possible for them to do so if they addressed the relationship of the Church with Islam, with religions of the East, with the world faiths.

So, in order to address its relationship with Judaism, the Church came to address its relationship with the rest of the world. That in itself is fascinating but, conversely, through desiring to be able to address its relationship with Israel, with the Jewish people, it came to address its relationship with the faiths of the world. So it facilitated that at the same time.

Now section 4 of *Nostra Aetate*, the particular section that related to the Jewish people, said four things. People focus on three of these and they are all remarkable but they are not at all new, contrary to many public misconceptions. First of all it said that any idea to condemn the Jews, as Dr. Sammak referred to, as collectively guilty for the death of Jesus, even at the time let alone in perpetuity, is wrong. The Council of Trent had actually stated that four hundred years earlier. But of course in practice, Christian teaching continued very often to ignore what the Council of Trent had said and continued to see Jews as collectively guilty. So, it was important to state, therefore, that the Jews were not to be seen as responsible even if this was not actually official Catholic teaching anyway.

The second thing it spoke of was the Covenant between God and the Jewish people being an eternal covenant. That in itself was not necessarily positive because Saint Augustine had already said that the Jews remain precisely in their homelessness and humiliation to prove what happens to you when you do not accept the truth of Christianity, and therefore the eternity of the covenant could be seen quite negatively. Indeed, even

the condemnation of anti-Semitism which is there within *Nostra Aetate* was not in itself new; there had already been condemnation of anti-Semitism. The big change is precisely in saying that it is wrong to see the Jews as condemned and as rejected and instead to affirm, therefore, a positive attitude; that the Jews have a part in, and therefore a significant role in the divine plan for humanity. That was not just a revolution, it was a Copernican revolution. It was the Church turning its whole

approach on its head as to how to deal with the Jewish people. So, we have come to a situation today where John Paul II can visit a Synagogue in Rome in 1986 and say that the Jewish People is not only the dearly beloved elder brother of the Church but that the Church has a relationship with Judaism that is intrinsic to its identity, a relationship such as it can have with no other religion because it is the very foundation of Christian identity; and to affirm this unique positive relationship.

Rabbi Rosen speaks on a panel with Mr. Oded Wiener, Cardinal Kurt Koch and Prof. Amos Luzzatto at a conference honouring Pope John XXIII, April 2013

That is quite remarkable. Very interesting that Pope Benedict XVI went one stage further and said, “You know, maybe we should not call Jews the elder brother because, if you read the Hebrew Bible and if you read the book of Genesis, the elder brother in the stories doesn’t usually come out on top, he usually gets the rough end





of the wedge, and therefore it's better to talk of parents in faith.

And now, of course, we have Pope Francis who can affirm categorically what had already been said by John Paul II, that anti-Semitism is a sin against God and man and, furthermore, that it is impossible to be simultaneously a real Christian and an anti-Semite and that, therefore, the love of the Jewish people is intrinsic to the very nature of what Christianity has to be. This is an unparalleled revolution in human history. Father Neuhaus again referred to it as one of the most significant changes of the twentieth century.

Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to claim that there is nothing comparable to this transformation in human history – to have seen a particular people as condemned, rejected by God, in league with the devil yesterday, and today a dearly beloved elder brother of the Church of an eternal covenant, intrinsic to the very nature of the Church.

This has an enormously significant universal message. If such a relationship that was so chronic, so poisoned,

Rabbi Rosen meeting at the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

so negative can be transformed into being one that is so positive and so constructive today, then there is no relationship that is beyond transformation, no matter how poisoned, how problematic, how vitiated it may be by politics.

No relationship is beyond positive transformation and that I believe, ladies and gentlemen, is the real, inspiring message of *Nostra Aetate*. Everything is really possible. We can transform it all and we can turn our world into the kind of world that our religions teach it really should be and, if I may say so, I think this very institution is a reflection precisely of that message. At any rate it is the challenge for this institution to bring about the realisation of that message.

Thank you.



Living dialogue among the Abrahamic faiths: the prophetic dimension

Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel

Ingeborg Gabriel holds the Chair for Social Ethics at the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Vienna. She was the first woman to do so since its foundation in 1384.

Prof. Gabriel has been active in interreligious dialogue throughout her career.

Career summary

- ❖ Worked with the UN
- ❖ Holds degrees in international relations and theology
- ❖ Main areas of work are human rights, ethics and economics as well as biblical ethics.





I thank you for the invitation. I am most honoured to speak here at this important event that commemorates one of the most decisive and innovative documents of the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, the declaration of the relation of the Church with non-Christian religions – *Nostra Aetate*, which remains an important inspiration for interreligious encounters worldwide.

In my short statement I want to make three points: the intention of the document and its relevance for today; the importance of the prophetic dimension of the monotheistic faiths and their ethos; and some consequences for the responsibility of religions today such as the answering of difficult questions concerning that which the prophetic voices of our religions should be revealing.

1. The *kairos* of globalisation

In 1965 globalisation was on the horizon but not yet fully developed. Its full development began with the burgeoning of new technologies in the 1980s. For *Nostra Aetate* it is the ever closer interdependence of humans in this age which constitutes the starting point for reflections on the desirable interactions of different religions.

The Declaration sets out by stating: “In our time when, day by day, mankind is being drawn closer together and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger...” (NA I). The first part of this sentence articulates a fact, the second part a wish and an ethical demand. This has to be kept in mind when analysing the dynamics of globalisation. Closeness here, as in other realms of life, does not necessarily lead to stronger personal ties. This holds true between peoples and nations as well as between religions.

Internationalisation as well as interreligious contacts demand an answer to what “draws people closer together”. It is not only the international community that needs to overcome fragmentation and enhance peace, it is also religious peoples who themselves have to give an answer to this particular situation in the history of mankind.

This challenge has become even more urgent during the past decades. The processes of globalisation led to a unique level of interdependence and global interactions as well as to an intensification of international life. The religions came back onto the international stage in a way that was not foreseeable five decades ago, and the tensions between religious and secular modes of life but also between religious groups have increased and

become one of the major challenges with regard to peace that we face today.

Nostra Aetate can thus truly be called a prophetic document laying the foundations for the global commitment of the Catholic Church to interreligious dialogue. It is interesting to note that this had not been its original intention, which rather was to adopt a document against Christian anti-Semitism that could put Jewish-Catholic relations on a new basis. It was the interventions – at first not at all welcome – by the Arab states that led to a wider approach which would prove innovative and beneficial for the fundamental theological self-understanding of the Catholic Church as an institution in its worldwide promotion of peace, “unity and love among men and indeed among nations” (NA I).

The means to do this is what constitutes the foundation of any interreligious dialogue: to find out “what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship” (NA I). In other words, not to set out by looking at the differences and developing an identity and profile against the others, the believers of other religions or non-believers, but to become creative in finding out where there is common ground and what we share as humans as well as religious persons. This approach based on commonalities has become even more important in an age characterised by pluralism, not only globally but also within most societies around the globe which, because of migrations, have become multicultural and multireligious to a degree not foreseeable 50 years ago. And it is evident that this process will continue.

Social cohesion and peace within societies and between them thus will progressively depend on serious cooperation of those believers and non-believers who are ready and willing to do exactly this: to look for what they have in common and not for what divides them; to look for what helps them to create not only economic but also religious and intellectual bonds that give a solid foundation to human societies on the basis of equality.

For the monotheistic religions, this common basis is the creation of all humans by God, with all having their final goal in Him. This goal however, because of human freedom, can be reached only through responsible, good and just actions in our lives. It is only through reflection on one’s responsibilities and corresponding actions that we can “be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations walk in His light” (NA I).

2. The monotheistic faiths as prophetic religions

Here I come to my second point. It has always fascinated me and continues to do so that salvation in the monotheistic religions depends on good deeds much more than on the right creed. It is ethics and not necessarily orthodoxy that counts. This has often been overlooked but it is obviously the emphasis on ethics that suggests that men and women are judged more by what they do and less by how exactly they formulated their beliefs.

This focus on ethics is what makes them prophetic religions. The prophets are those who tell humans which path to take and give them signposts with regard to their responsibilities in this world, with regard to God and to other human beings and, as we lately understand, vis-à-vis God's creation. Their strong ethical impulses throughout the ages oblige believers to create a society that proves worthy of God's call and in which all humans can live as far as possible "without need and fear" (preamble of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights).

This insistence on humanism and the well-being of all humans, for me, constitutes the great commonality between monotheistic religions, more than that they have Abraham as their ancestor. Thus it is that Abraham is seen as a righteous person par excellence, who does justice to all, respects them and promotes peace.

The title proposed to me – *Living dialogue among the Abrahamic Faiths* – hints, however, at yet another commonality between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All three are religions of the Word. They believe that God speaks to humans, that He acts like a person addressing other persons face to face – here Abraham is indeed the prominent example. This emphasis on the Word and with it the singular person it is spoken to is most astonishing in a cosmos that has existed long before there were humans and that is, as we know, immense. So it is a by no means self-evident. It constitutes a strong common ground of all monotheistic religions giving an immense worth and dignity to each and every human being. If, as all of our Holy Scriptures say, men and women are to imitate God through their actions, then we are to be people of the Word. For Christians, Christ is the Word.

The living God is not like the idols made by humans who, as the psalmist says, "have a mouth and cannot speak, hands that cannot grasp, a nose that cannot smell". He therefore wants living human beings who are able to speak and to act and to do this responsibly.

This belief makes a living dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths possible in the first place. It is God who continues to create through His word, dia-logou, with intention and purpose and to further the good in this world. He is thus the initiator of all true words and the source of all good actions, a common belief of the monotheistic beliefs with far reaching ethical consequences.

If God speaks to men and women, dia-logou, those who believe in His word, i.e. the faithful, are also called to speak to each dia-logou. They are to communicate to others what they have understood of God's words under the contingent conditions of our lives, and that is always very limited because of the infinity of Him.

Speaking to each other is moreover the opposite of violence, hatred and manipulation. Dialogue therefore means nothing less than to overcome all forms of non-communication that over the ages have poisoned the relationships between people, whether or not religious, and in many ways continue to do so.

In the Hebrew and Christian Bible we repeatedly find the sentence that all believers are prophets. This means that they are to act through the Word and they are to reflect on what they know from God and interpret it for this age and its needs. Prophets speak about God, His judgement and mercy, and they admonish the faithful to do good and avoid evil. To find out what exactly that means is a complex task in any age, and one that requires intensive and serious ethical reflections. Here, the believers of monotheistic faiths can support each other with better discernment: what is the good and the just act to be done here and now, learning from the rich traditions? In any case, I consider it an immense task to spell out the prophetic heritages that we have been vouchsafed for our times and to do this not against each other but in learning from one another.

There are different perceptions of God's word and this will remain so. We are Jews, Christians or Muslims and no serious believer can want to adhere to a mixture of two or three of these religions. Syncretism is not an option. But this need not keep us from working together intensively. Indeed, it demands exactly this so as to "overcome want and fear" of humans and, through this, serve the Almighty God since, to cite again *Nostra Aetate*: "We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God." Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked

together that Scripture says: “He who does not love does not know God” (1 John 4:8 – NA V).

This sounds like a rather serious task, and indeed it is. But it is also – and this is my concrete experience with interreligious dialogue – an immensely enriching one, an experience that gives joy as all good things do. This enrichment is not only intellectual, it also is spiritual.

To give two examples: In one of my first encounters with Muslims somebody told us that Muslims, out of respect, always place the Koran on the highest place within the room and place no other books on top of it. I do the same to this day with the Bible, and I am grateful to have received this inspiration from a Muslim. And when I think of women theologians, the person who first comes to my mind is a Jewish feminist theologian to whom I owe a lot and for whom I feel much respect. She is, in Christian terms, a saint for me. In this way I could cite other examples from other religions from whose practices and believers, through dialogue, I was immensely enriched in my own faith.

3. The prophetic mission in this age and the common action for a more humane world

Prophets do not speak in general. They are called to a particular duty and mission for a specific age. As concrete human beings they are to speak to other human beings about God and their responsibilities, mainly about how they are to treat other creatures. Prophets always address men and women in a particular situation sharing their “joys and hopes, grievances and anxieties”, as the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II states in the beginning.

The central question therefore is: What should the prophetic voices of our religions be pointing out for this, our age? This is not all that easy to discern. The Bible tells us that there are true but also false prophets who confuse the Word of God with their own interpretation and who distort it for personal gains or for the sake of political profit, knowingly or unknowingly. What, therefore, does the prophetic dimension of a living dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths or the religions of the Word entail today?

If we look at the often dismal conditions in this world and the anxieties of human beings which we can observe daily in the news it is clear that we should be working for peace and justice, this being an immense task. We are thus, to use the beautiful Jewish expression, to contribute to the *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world and

the construction of eternity, in this way living up to our individual responsibility before God.

When I teach an interreligious summer course in a monastery near Vienna every second year to young people, mainly Christians and Muslims, I start with a diagram showing that more than half of the world’s population is either Christian or Muslim. Then I ask them: What do you think that God, in whom we believe, wants us to do in this age? How can we live responsible lives before Him, doing His will, knowing that He wants good for His creatures and all human beings. I always feel that this question is important for them and also for us.

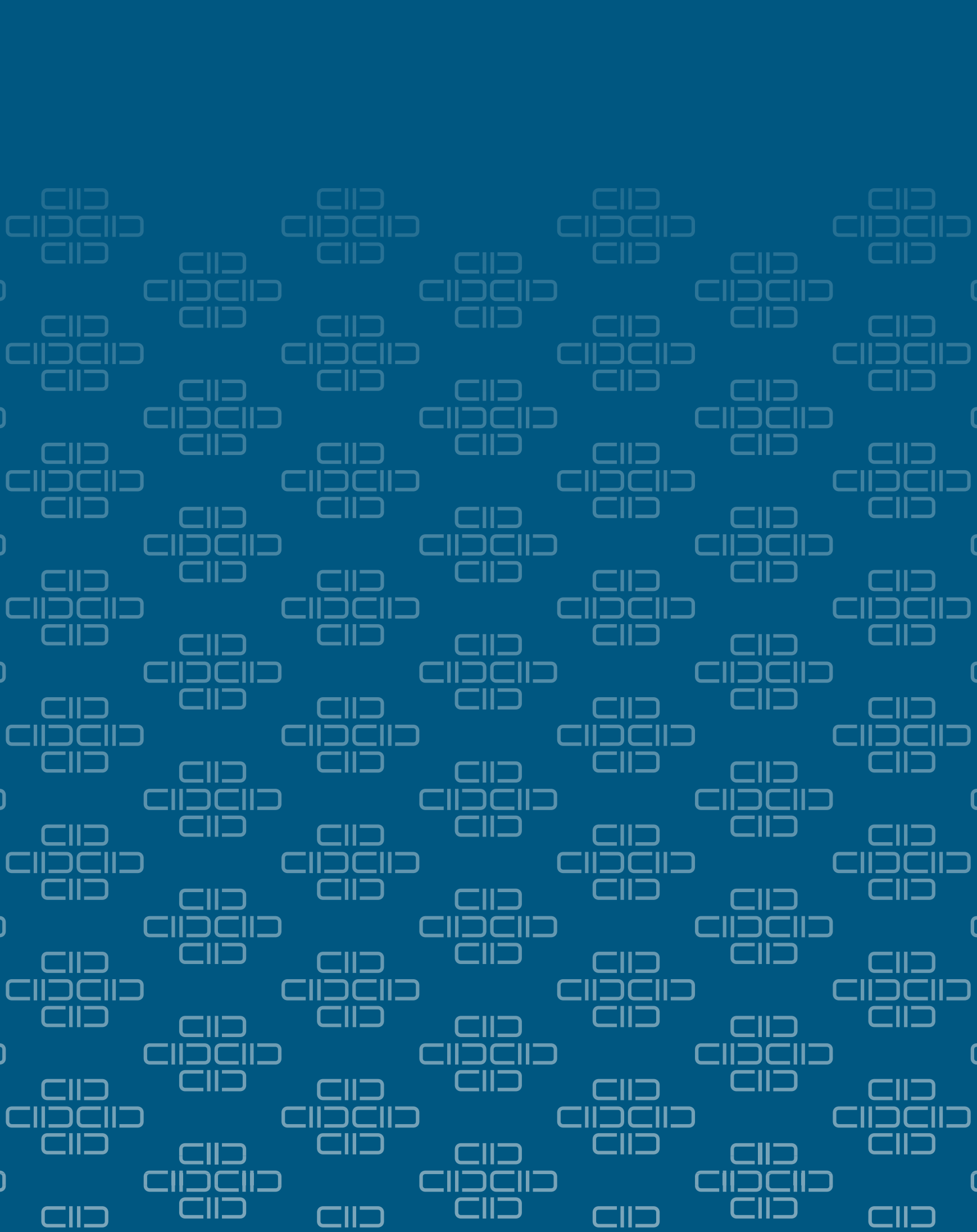
Let me come to the end. Religious confrontations have increased in a way that could not be foreseen 50 years ago when *Nostra Aetate* was written. People kill each other in the name of God. This, for every man and woman who truly believes in Him, is the most serious blasphemy and a sinful abuse of His name, which has to be acted against with every means possible.

So for the sake of peace but also for the sake of God we have to search, with all the means that are available to us, for possibilities to foster peace between religions and at all levels of society, in all countries. This is a task for all true believers who must form alliances amongst each other knowing that God cannot be honoured by them killing each other but only by good deeds and the readiness to forgive and to work on improving relations. This is our common duty. Peace cannot be separated from justice.

Pope Francis recently called on all religions in his eco-encyclical *Laudato Si’* to care for our common home, to intensify efforts to avoid ecological disasters, to overcome injustices in this world and to work together. Here, as in efforts to combat other debasing practices like modern slavery and human trafficking, religions are called to cooperate closely.

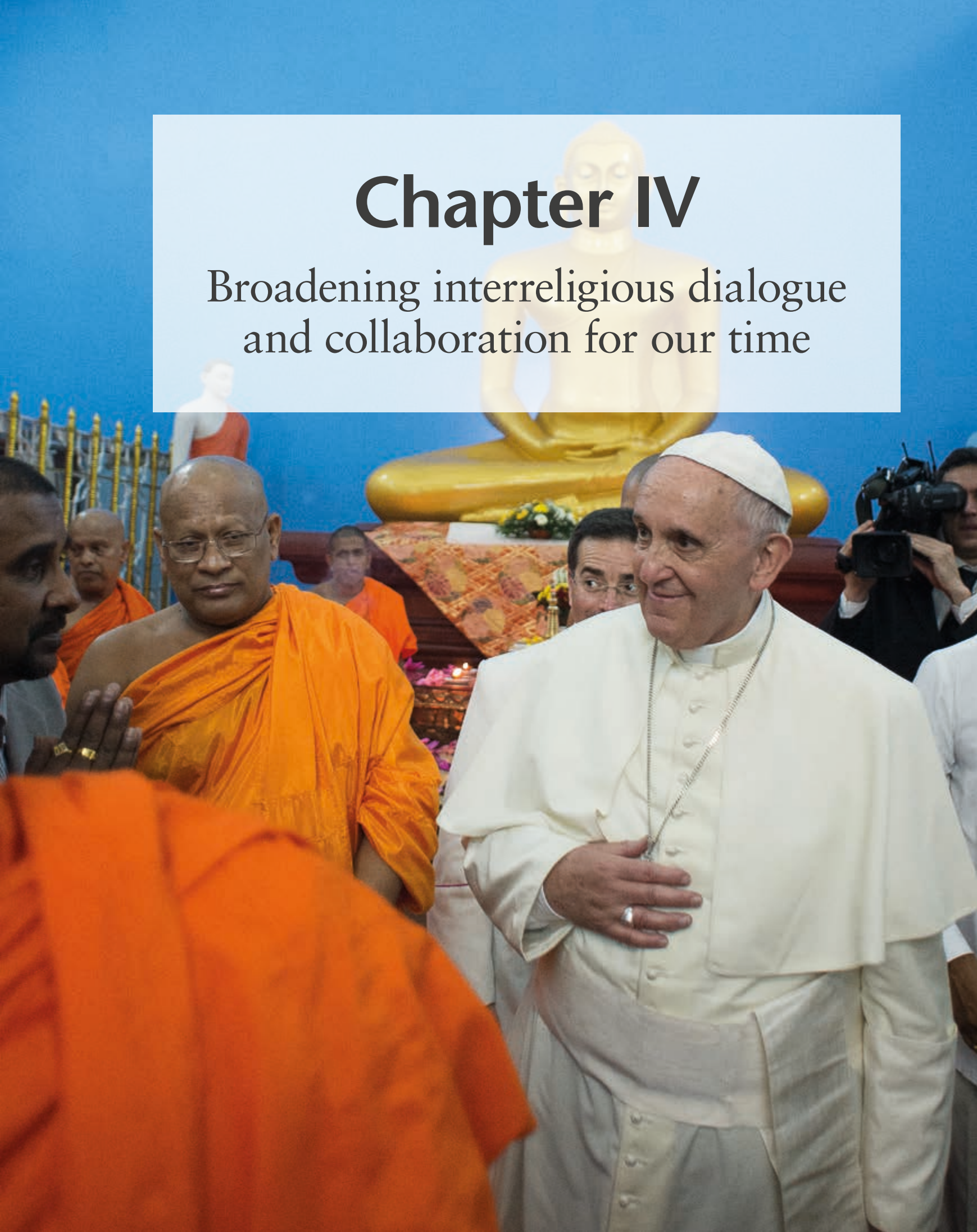
So as to live up to the prophetic and human dimension of our religions and so as to honour the name of God through our responsible action and faith, interreligious dialogue remains of utmost importance. Thereby true human fulfilment and the glory of God cannot be separated from each other since, as says the Christian theologian Irenaeus of Lyon in the second century: “The glory of God is first and foremost the living human being.”

Thank you for your attention.



Chapter IV

Broadening interreligious dialogue
and collaboration for our time





Introduction

Dr. Hamad Al-Majed

Dr. Hamad Al-Majed is Faculty Member at Imam Muhammad Bin Saud University.

Dr. Al-Majed's positions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are a testament to his commitment to dialogue – bringing people together, elaborating on mutual understanding and urging the avoidance of violence among religious groups.

Dr. Al-Majed is convinced of the importance of dialogue between different groups in the education system.

Career summary

- ❖ Faculty member of education at the Imam Muhammad Bin Saud University in Riyadh
- ❖ Founding Member of the National Society for Human Rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- ❖ 1996–2001: Director General of the Islamic Culture Centre, London
- ❖ 1996–2001: Chief Editor of the *Islamic Quarterly* journal, London
- ❖ Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the British Muslims' Heritage Centre.





During the previous panels, we heard many reflections on the impact of *Nostra Aetate* on interreligious relations. *Nostra Aetate*, as we know, was an important milestone, heavily focused on the relations between the Abrahamic faiths. In this third panel, we move on to a forward-looking discussion. We will be discussing the future and expanding our conversation to include Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh perspectives.

Before giving the floor to our speakers, I would like to briefly reflect on the need of dialogue and collaboration in our time. Our society is urgently in need of peace, and peace only comes through dialogue, respect and recognition of the Other.

The Quran called on all of us to get to know the Other. What better way is there to do that than dialogue? God stated in his saying:

قال تعالى: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ {

that there was a reason He created man and woman, and He has a reason for making us all belong to different tribes and cultures. His reason is for us to get to know each other – through dialogue. In other words, He is telling us that diversity is part of the world’s beauty. Also, when the Quran says in Surah 109, verse 6:

Dr. Al-Majed participates in a discussion on the value of women in interreligious dialogue, Vienna, 2015

قال تعالى: {لكم دينكم ولي دين}

which means: “To you your religion, and to me my religion”, there is another sign of acceptance of religious diversity.

Nostra Aetate celebrated this diversity and broke barriers 50 years ago. Although it mostly impacted Jewish-Christian relations, it represented also an important step in the relations between Christians and Muslims. In the 1970s, few years after the Declaration was published, there were many dialogue initiatives among both groups. For example, a delegation from the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, in Cairo, visited Rome in December 1970. Later, in 1974, a Saudi delegation of experts in Islamic law were received in audience by Pope Paul VI. Encounters like these are still taking place, as there is clearly a need to learn about each other and to engage in dialogue.

The three speakers from this panel will now share their experiences and thoughts about how to expand the collaboration in our time. Swami Agnivesh, member of the KAICIID Board of Directors, a long-time advocate for human rights in India and beyond, as well as the president of the World Council of Arya Samaj, will discuss religious peacemaking. Rev. Kosho Niwano, President-Designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, will share her Buddhist reflections on creating a culture of dialogue and peace. Bhai Sahib Ji Mohinder Singh, the third in line of Sikh religious leaders of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha UK – and the final speaker, will highlight his Sikh perspective.





The anguish of our human condition – reflections on religious peacemaking

Swami Agnivesh

Swami Agnivesh is President Emeritus of the World Council of Arya Samaj.

Swami Agnivesh finds that values common to all religions have been neglected and that emphasis should be placed on an appeal to the commonality between diverse religions to bring united action among different peoples.

He works towards the liberation of child slaves and bonded labourers and has had tremendous success in achieving those aims through initiating the process of dialogue.

Career summary

- ❖ President Emeritus of World Council of Arya Samaj
- ❖ Founder-Chairperson of Bandhua Mukti Morcha (Bonded Labour Liberation Front)
- ❖ Founder-Convenor of the Parliament of All Religions
- ❖ 1977–1982: Member of the Haryana Legislative Assembly, India
- ❖ 1979: Minister of Education in Haryana, India
- ❖ 1994–2004: Chairperson of the UN Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery
- ❖ Former Global Trustee of United Religion Initiative (URI). Co-founder of URI's Religions for Social Justice Cooperation Circle which has been a powerful force for inter-faith harmony and cooperation in India
- ❖ Honoured with several awards including: Right Livelihood Award (alternative Nobel Peace Prize), Stockholm, Sweden; Freedom and Human Rights Award, Bern, Switzerland; Anti-Slavery International Award, London, UK, 1990; Rajiv Gandhi National Communal Harmony Award, New Delhi, India, 2004.

Swami Agnivesh addressing an interfaith gathering at Salmia Indian Model School, Kuwait, 2015







would like to begin my address with a prayer:

AUM

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Ik Oankar Satnam Waheguru.

The Vedas proclaim “AUM” the most authentic name of Parmatma, the most Compassionate. The opening phrase in the Holy Koran –

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

– means: “In the name of Allah the most merciful, the most compassionate.” “Ik Oankar Satnam Waheguru” – One universal creator God – is the opening phrase in the Sikh religious scriptures, Gurugranth Sahib.

Friends, because of paucity of time I am going to get straight to the point. It was my good fortune to listen to all of these eminent analysts this afternoon. I was wondering how I am going to define Hinduism as a religion because Hinduism has never been a religion in the way that we understand any other religion.

A religion means, among other things, an organised place of worship; institutionalised churches, mosques or temples; rituals; dogmas; scriptures; and prophets. Hinduism never had this. Hinduism is largely an amorphous concept based on the universal spiritual values of the Vedas and the Upanishads and some other ancient writings. We believe that there is one Ishwar – God, one Parmatma – the universal soul which has many names. “Ekam Sat vipra bahuda vadanti” – God or truth is one and wise people call that by various names too.

For me it’s no problem to call my God Allah. That’s why I say:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

or God, or Waheguru, or compassion, as Buddha would like us to believe. Why enter unnecessarily into the debate of whether God is or is not there? Compassion and justice, those are the most important things, and this is what liberates me from all of the clichés, all that goes into the making of an organised religion.

I was born into a very high caste, into a Brahmin family of south India, into a Hindu sort of a religion, and I used to practise all of those rituals and dogmas and also upheld the caste system including un-touchability.

It is a long story, but what I want to say is that at the age of 17, when I went to Calcutta for my college education, I was introduced to the simple teachings of the Vedas and Upanishads and liberated myself from day one. I stopped all forms of idol worship, stopped believing in the caste system, started teaching, realising that all women are equal to men and that there is no place for any caste system, high or low. And my view about other religions also changed because I came to believe that humanity is one family. We have a very profound concept in the Vedas: वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् – the whole world is one family.

The then president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, invited me to his World Bank office in Washington and asked: “Why are you so critical of our globalisation?” I said: “Look Mr. President, I find that your globalisation is a myth. You’ve commodified everything including human values. You’ve put a price tag on everything and have allowed market forces to dictate the price and, for private interests, to buy it all, including natural resources, for a profit. Now this is a globalisation which I don’t accept.”

He asked: “What do you have to offer?” I replied: “Of course, वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् – the world is one family.” He asked: “What’s the difference?” I said: “वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् means the whole of humanity is one family.” “Of course, no problems,” he said. “No,” I said, “there is a big problem. If you believe that we are one family, then who first gets food, love and affection in the family? The smallest child, the weakest in the family, gets his or her claim first. And the bread winner of the family gets his or her share last. And this works in spiritual spontaneity. You don’t have to organise the economics of input-output analysis and this and that. That is how a family sustains itself. Can you organise the whole world on these principles that those who are the weakest in our humanity, those who are the poorest, those who are the most marginalised, those who are the most voiceless and the most defenceless come first?”

Inspired by the Vedas and by Mahatma Gandhi, I have been working for the last 48 years among the poorest of the poor in India, the least among the last. And who inspired Gandhi? One of the European philosophers, John Ruskin. It is very strange that, when he was still in South Africa, Gandhi read Ruskin’s *Unto This Last* and was so completely thrilled that he took it up as his life’s mission.

Anyway, what I am trying to say is that when I started practising my new life I felt so liberated. I started by saying that I don't have a religion, I am not a Brahmin, I am not a Hindu and the Hindus have no problem with that. Hindus used to worship – some still worship – any number of idols in the temples and with rituals. I not only reject that, I criticise them openly, publicly, making political statements. I say that idolatry is the bane of our country.

Caste-ism has to be rejected completely as all human beings are born equal. God has not made any child higher or lower than any other child. It is we with our man-made institutions and caste system and, I am sorry to say, the religions and economic institutions of the rich and poor, that make these people either rich or poor. God doesn't do that. God's sun shines equally. God's air that we breathe does not differentiate, it is the same for all.

All children have same five fingers and two eyes and everything else. Give them equal opportunity and you will see the results. Give a black child opportunity equal to a white child's and I am sure that the black child will outshine the white. Give the Dalit – the untouchable – boy or a girl equal opportunity and the Dalit, the lowest untouchable, will outshine the Brahmins.

But we have institutionalised poverty in order to, sort of, worship the rich, a handful of them, one percent of our humanity. You should be aware that one percent of all our people in the world own more than 85 percent of the wealth, while the remaining 99 percent own hardly 15 percent. Does it concern any of our religions?

I have been fighting this injustice for the last 48 years. I work among the carpet workers and the brick kiln workers, people who exemplify modern age slavery. For nine years I was Chairperson, in Geneva, of the United Nation's Voluntary Trust Fund for Contemporary Forms of Slavery, and every time I read the latest statistics I would hang my head in shame because India was home to the largest numbers of slaves, including child slaves and child prostitution. But India's population is bigger than all of Europe and Africa put together, so I am not surprised that so many problems are there.

Humanity is crying for some radical shift, a paradigm shift and we are simply juggling among ourselves between this act and that act, and this ritual and that ritual. Why? Why are they so important? Somebody said something 1,400 years ago, 2,000 years ago, 3,000 years ago – what is the religion that existed beyond

3,000 years ago? Why are we bogged down with merely these 3,000 years of history? The whole of humanity has got a long, long history. So, let's come up with a spiritual paradigm, universal spiritual values which are the quintessence of all of our religions.

I am not militating against any particular religion. I think that all of our religions have got the essence which can be learnt and taught as universal spiritual values – truth, love, compassion and justice. And according to the Vedas, truth is God – the energy of truth pervading the whole of the universe. The Vedas say that the whole of universe is being pervaded by the God-element, the God-force throughout the entire universe.

ॐ ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम् ॥ १ ॥

– there is only one universal God and everyone should worship that very God. Mahatma Gandhi made a very profound statement about this particular mantra. He said that if all knowledge systems were to be destroyed, and if I can save this little one, I could recreate the whole knowledge system. Now, why is that?

Can all of us agree – I am offering just a one-liner – that we accept the supremacy of one God and we should all worship that one God who is universal and who has no form, who is all existence, all truth, all love, all compassion and all justice, a justice unlimited. To create a human society based on equity and unlimited justice – can we do that? Can this, our Centre, be the harbinger of this unity?

Let's take a word from Islam: "Tauheed" – the Koranic concept that there is only one God. The Koran talks about Rabbul Alameen – God of the entire universe. It does not talk about Rabbul Muslameen – God of Muslims, Rabbul Hindueen – God of Hindus, Rabbul Christiaeen – God of Christians; it says Rabbul Alameen, God of the whole universe, and this is exactly what the Vedas said earlier. This is what Guru Nanak Dev said: "Ishvar Allah noor upaya qudrat de saab banday, ek noor tay sab jag upajya kaun bhale ko munday" – God created light of which all the beings were born, and from this light, the universe. So who is good and who is bad?

The entire universe emanates from the blessings of our creator God and if that creator God is there in everything throughout the universe, then that creator God is inside you and me as human beings. You are

carrying 13 trillion cells, my friend. There are 13 trillion cells in your body, God is pervading every cell and you don't have to take one step outside to commune with your creator God.

There is no need for any mosque, temple, church or any specific place. All of these things we make, artisans make, and we then make them more sacred. If a mosque is destroyed or a temple is destroyed we are ready to kill any number of people. The human body is the most sacred temple which God creates for each one of us, the most precious temple that we have. Why don't we see the preciousness and the sacredness of the human body? This is the challenge and if we can do that, if we can bring this spiritual consciousness to every child, then hurting any human being, even by word of mouth let alone by arms or by bullets, is sacrilegious. If you hurt any human being then you are anti-God, however often you visit a place of worship. You are also deceiving yourself.

So, the time has come when we need to deconstruct these organised religions. I am using a slightly harsh approach, so it is very difficult.

I was deeply impressed by the Cardinal. In his starting point he said: "We need to do something different." We can't go in circles, we cannot go on like that, and therefore, friends, it's time like Buddha said to uphold "Dharma" – religion. Note that he did not say Buddha Dharma, although he has been made into Buddhism.

Guru Nanak did not talk about another religion. No, they all talked about one God and we should all relate to

one God, one Creator God who is inside of us. Through meditation on the value of truth, compassion, justice, love, we should imbibe those values and tell our children that "you are free to write your own scripture, your own Bible, your own Koran and to be your own prophet, your own Guru, doubt everybody, all these big, big people".

I teach my young children three things: to doubt, to debate, and if necessary, to dissent. This is spirituality. You should teach people, young minds, to dissent, that it's right to dissent, to disagree and assert one's human autonomy. You are the creation of God. What is there for you to feel ashamed about? Each human child should be celebrated and we should give them equal freedom, economic equality, completely. All of us human beings own this planet earth, all of the land, the forests, the water and the mineral wealth. This entire spectrum and everything else is commonly owned by us according to the Vedas.

So, friends, I can go on and on but the time is not available. I will finish it here and I would love to engage in fierce debate. I don't want you to accept; you should doubt whatever I said. You should debate and, if necessary, dissent: "Get out Swami, we don't agree with you."

Thank you so much.

Swami Agnivesh celebrating Earth Day 2016 with religious leaders of various communities, Amritsar, India





Liberation and illumination – reflections on creating a culture of dialogue and peace

Rev. Kosho Niwano

Reverend Kosho Niwano is President Designate, Rissho Kosei-kai.

The granddaughter of founder Nikkyo Niwano and first daughter of President Nichiko Niwano, Reverend Niwano currently devotes herself to sharing the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* with leaders both in Japan and overseas as well as with the members who visit the Great Sacred Hall for worship services and special events from all parts of Japan.

Career summary

- ❖ President Designate of Rissho Kosei-kai
- ❖ Participated at several inter-faith congresses including Religions for Peace World Assembly, and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace
- ❖ Studied at Rissho Kosei-kai's Gakurin seminary
- ❖ Graduated from Gakushuin University, Tokyo.



Rev. Niwano in conversation with Ven. Noyu Yamada, Chief Abbot of Enryakuji Temple on Mt. Hiei, near Kyoto, Japan

*Rev. Nikkyo Niwano shaking hands with Pope Paul VI.
Father Spae is in conversation behind. September 1965*





ood evening Eminences, Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear friends, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the organiser that I have been given this precious opportunity of speaking upon the theme of liberation and illumination on this very important occasion of our reflecting on *Nostra Aetate*.

I am Kosho Niwano from Rissho Kosei-kai, a Japanese Buddhist organisation. I now also serve as one of the KAICIID Board Members.

The words *Nostra Aetate* remind me of a very special feeling. It was the fact that my grandfather Nikkyo Niwano was invited as a guest to the opening of the fourth session of the Second Vatican Council 50 years ago. On that occasion my grandfather met with Pope Paul VI and that meeting turned out to be a very crucial influence on Rissho Kosei-kai, as well as on my own life.

Shakyamuni Buddha spoke 2,500 years ago: “Some people say that it is truth, but others say that it is false. In this way, people speak against each other with prejudice. Why don’t people following the path of faith speak about the common point?”

Fundamentally, religion does not exclude others. The essence of religion is the oneness between self and others which enables humans to love others as they love themselves. It is an aberration that religions divide themselves and fight each other. All religions should learn from each other, discuss common points and cooperate together for realising peace, based on these disciplines.

There is no other way than religious cooperation in which the modern world and humankind will be given substantial salvation. These are my grandfather’s convictions. He was given an invitation to the Vatican Council through Cardinal Marella, the first President of the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue of the Vatican. My grandfather visited the Vatican in September 1965.

The words of Pope Paul VI at the opening ceremony of the Vatican Council were firmly focused on the spirit of *Nostra Aetate*. On the following day of his private audience with my grandfather, Pope Paul said to him: “I know the religious cooperation that you are endeavouring to promote. Please promote it wholeheartedly. I am convinced that Almighty God will surely bless and protect your activities.”

My grandfather was deeply moved and the Pope’s words became his strong conviction. Nikkyo Niwano,

filled with determination, said: “I cannot fulfil the sacred mission of a religious person as long as I think only of my own religion or religious denomination.” He then started taking action towards founding the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP).

That was about the time I was born – my grandfather was in Kyoto on January 22nd 1968, just three days after my birth. There, discussions were held among Japanese and American religious leaders towards the realisation of the WCRP concept. There was also an episode involving my grandfather and a representative of American religious leaders which demonstrates mutual respect and consideration.

In my infant memory there always exists the image of my grandfather travelling around the world. The topics around the dining table at home were always religious dialogue, religious cooperation and world peace. There were bound to be many hurdles and problems in implementing those objectives, but my grandfather always shared many stories with us grandchildren with his brilliant eyes shining like a boy’s: “Today, I met such a wonderful person,” and: “I had a wonderful experience today.” I loved and always enjoyed his stories. Thus, I was brought up with a growing sense that there are so many wonderful religions and people in the world.

As a result of unimaginable and tireless efforts, the first WCRP General Assembly was held in Kyoto, in 1970, five years after *Nostra Aetate*.

What my grandfather cherished was that interreligious dialogue and cooperation should not be exclusively for people directly involved in the agreed actions. At any occasion and in any place he shared – with young people in particular – the importance of interreligious dialogue, cooperation and concrete actions. Thanks to his efforts, there are many young people in the Rissho Kosei-kai movement who wish to dedicate themselves to religious dialogue with a firm belief in its effectiveness.

There is an episode when the body meeting at Rissho Kosei-kai was formulating the following year’s action plan when my grandfather said: “We should not make a plan that aims only at our own growth and development. Instead, we should have a plan which enables other religions and organisations to grow and develop together.”

For my grandfather, who devoted more than half of his life to realising peace in the world through interreligious dialogue and cooperation, it was a joy superior to any other when Pope John Paul II attended and delivered

a commemorative speech at the opening ceremony of the sixth World Assembly of WCRP held at Synod Hall in the Vatican in November 1994.

I am humbly dedicated to the activities of interreligious dialogue and cooperation. As I mentioned earlier, I am one of the four co-moderators of Religions for Peace (RfP), previously named WCRP, and I am very happy to be actively engaged at KAICIID.

I remember my grandfather's words: "When I called religious leaders for religious cooperation, almost everyone ridiculed me saying that religious cooperation is nonsense. Others said that you speak of religious cooperation because you don't have confidence in your own faith and religion." I am sure that the people my grandfather met while he was travelling around Japan and around the world, as well as the religious leaders who ridiculed and criticised him, must have been filled with fear, doubt and denial. Human beings are weak, myself included.

Our forebears, who took a very courageous first step in *Nostra Aetate* together with the founding member of WCRP, finally realised the so called "Miracle of humankind – WCRP" in overcoming various obstacles and hurdles with the firm conviction that world peace cannot be created without interreligious dialogue and

cooperation; that creating a platform of dialogue is inevitable in the face of the danger that nuclear war will annihilate all of humankind.

During the 50 years since its initiative, interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding have been steadily advancing. However, unfortunately, the world is being divided by ignorance, doubt and fear of each other, and directed toward conflict and antagonism. We have to take the steps of our forebears and ask ourselves again what dialogue is most needed now, and upgrade the operating system of dialogue itself.

The Vatican participates as an observer in KAICIID, an initiative of former King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia. The participation can be said to have borne new fruit from the *Nostra Aetate* spirit of 50 years ago. Respecting, supporting, cooperating and backing the will to open dialogue provides a chance of realising a society that makes diversity more affluent in a true sense without resorting only to the value systems of the western world.

Rev. Niwano at a board meeting of Religions for Peace Japan, Kyoto, 2015



© Religions for Peace Japan



Being among people who have the same opinions must be very pleasant and self-satisfying, but ‘chatting’ is not dialogue. Dialogue is communication or interaction with a different being to oneself. There exists something to be transcended or overcome. Dialogue is an interaction with the will to – or intention of – trying to overcome the discrepancy and conflict generated by the encounter with different values, while recognising and admitting the fact of difference in itself.

At the *Nostra Aetate* fiftieth anniversary event held at the Gregorian University of Rome, I spoke about the upgrading of dialogue and many participants generously talked to me after my presentation. This upgrading is easier said than done.

I would firstly like to cherish the idea of proving that others can be right. Although we are very good at insisting on our own standing points and values, we seldom

Rev. Niwano talking with Ven. Seihan Mori, Chief Priest of Kiyomizu-dera Temple, Kyoto, Japan

listen to others’ voices. Even if we are ready to listen, their voices easily pass through us. But if we are really sincere in proving the values of others, we will challenge ourselves to listening seriously as well as finding good points in others. When we work hard to find good points in others, our eyes are warm and our hearts and minds are rich and affluent.

I would like to close my speech by promising to you all that I will continue with my friends and colleagues the dialogue of ‘proving others’, even though it may be a humble challenge.

Thank you very much.



The Sikh Perspective

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh

Bhai Sahib, Bhai (Dr) Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, OBE, KSG.

Bhai Sahib is the third in line of Sikh religious leaders of Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ) UK. He is active in religious practice and propagation; social regeneration; heritage conservation; education, health and infrastructure development. He is passionate about empowering individuals and organisations with common religious values underpinned through selfless service, education and exposure to diverse experiences.

Career summary

- ❖ Chairman of the Nishkam Group of Charitable Organisations
- ❖ Patron of Sikh-ethos, multi-faith school trust that operates four state-funded schools in the UK
- ❖ Chair and Trustee of the proposed Museum of World's Religions, UK (MWR UK)
- ❖ Co-convenor of the proposed International Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation
- ❖ One of fifty co-presidents and trustees of Religions for Peace (RfP) International
- ❖ Recipient of the Papal Knighthood of St. Gregory the Great (KSG)
- ❖ Officer of Her Majesty the Queen's British Empire (OBE)
- ❖ Awarded three UK university honorary doctorates.





Brothers and sisters. We Sikhs have two greetings. The first is Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh – the army of the pure belongs to God and the victory belongs to God. The second is Sat Siri Akahal – Truth is the Eternal Being. Both of these greetings actually confirm the existence of God. When we greet each other, we don't say hello; we invoke God, confirming that He is Omnipresent. Our faith is based on this premise, that God is everywhere. And each one of us here has the same divine spark.

Our founder and the first of ten successive Gurus, Guru Nanak, travelled widely. Between 1497 and 1521 he went on a remarkable inter-faith journey of dialogues spanning some 23 years, covering over 27,000 kilometres, almost exclusively on foot. That equates to an average of over three kilometres a day, every day for 23 years. Where did he go? Why did he go? What was he doing? In my humble opinion, it was his profound compassion and pity for the human condition that drove him to meet as many people as he could in different locations.

We humans are split personalities, we have infinite goodness and infinite wickedness, both at the same time. We have to control ourselves, we have to mobilise the goodness that is inherent in us. What does this goodness comprise? First and foremost it is compassion, forgiveness, truthfulness, transparency, accountability and contentment as opposed to yearning for more and more. It is also an abundance of humility and love. In aggregate, this constitutes a gold standard for every human being. There is also a wicked standard – we have lust, we are revengeful, we are greedy, we have unnecessary attachment with things and we have ego. E-G-O – Edging God Out – the worst thing. When you edge God out, then you remain with a big 'I', and arrogance is the worst affliction of humans.

The first Guru taught us to be humble. Never before in history had a prophet bowed down to a disciple and said: "You are the prophet." This happened within the Sikh Dharam – the Sikh religion – ten times with the

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh meeting H.E. Sheikh Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan, Minister of Culture, Youth, and Community Development, UAE and United Nations at the first World Inter-faith Harmony Day held in Dubai, February 2016

succession of each Guru, and this is a remarkable thing.

Five days before Guru Nanak left the world, he put his forehead on the feet of his disciple and said: "Now I will sit down below here and you are the Guru." The third guru did the same, as did the fourth, the fifth and the sixth, up until the tenth Guru who bowed down to the sacred text – Guru Granth Sahib Ji – the Sikh scriptures – the eternal, timeless Guru. So our message was complete by 1708. We were told not to wait for another Messiah, that the message was complete.

The record shows that Guru Nanak went as far as Dhaka, as well as west to Mecca and Baghdad, north to Tibet and south to Sri Lanka. He travelled occasionally with his two faithful companions, Bhai (brother) Mardana who was a Muslim musician and Bhai Bala who was a Hindu. He had a Muslim on one side and a Hindu on the other because the population comprised a predominance of Hindus and Muslims. It is important to contextualise this as there was conflict where people were trying to convert each other.

Throughout these journeys, neither knowing where he would spend the night nor where would he eat, Guru Nanak spread the message of the oneness of God. He stressed the need to live peacefully in the world inspired by a sense of loving duty not just to the Creator but to the entire creation. Whatever one's faith, whatever one's background, his teachings were expressed in lyrical verse urging us to live up to those qualities latent within us all that make us in the image of God, namely, love, compassion, forgiveness, truth, humility and selflessness.





Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh meeting His Holiness Pope Francis at the Inter-faith Audience held in The Square of St. Peter's Basilica at the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate

The Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the eternal Guru, comprises hymns of Guru Nanak and of five of the subsequent nine Gurus as well as those of Hindu and Muslim saints. This renders it a unique model of inter-faith sacred text. So every time I bow before the Guru Granth Sahib Ji, I bow down to the writings of the Muslims and I bow down to the writings of the Hindus as well as the writings of the Sikh Gurus without any problem. The example of Guru Nanak and of our inter-faith scripture teaches Sikhs two important elements of the Dharam that compels Sikhs to embrace interreligious dialogue which is not an option but a vital necessity.

The fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev Ji had the foundation stone of the most sacred Sikh shrine, Sri Harimandir Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple, laid by a Muslim saint, Mian Mir. Here is a Sikh Guru asking a Muslim saint to lay the foundation. It doesn't happen these days.

Gurudwara is place of worship for the Sikhs. Guru is a word that has been adopted in English – Gu is darkness, Ru is light. Somebody capable of taking you from darkness into light is a Guru. These days this is often misused. For instance, you hear of somebody being a “gambling guru” when, for us, gambling is a taboo. In contemporary parlance we can have gambling gurus and fashion gurus but, for us, Guru is a very sacred term. We have God Almighty and then we have Sat Guru (meaning the True Guru) and then we have Guru followed by nature. This, in essence comprises a spiritual hierarchy.

In 1605, when the fifth Guru, Guru Arjun Dev Ji was being tortured, he stated that he did not harbour hate for those who were torturing him. In fact, nobody was alien to him including his enemy. He accepted his torture as the will of God. The ninth Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji made the supreme sacrifice in 1675, giving his life to protect the freedom of religious belief and the practice of a faith other than his own. He was beheaded in Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi.

The messages to be gleaned from these supreme sacrifices is that we should not just better and elevate ourselves, but that we should support and help all of



Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh receiving the inaugural African Inter-faith Harmony Award of the Year, awarded by the United Religions Initiative Africa, February 2016

those who come to be associated with us. Indeed, we need to go beyond the self.

We often hear talk about a tolerant society. Tolerance is demeaning, acceptance is slightly better, albeit still demeaning, respect is better but we are required to go beyond that and sacrifice ourselves for the other. The tenth Guru in his writings states: “Manas ki jaat Sabhe ek hi pehchanbo” – recognise all of mankind as a single caste of humanity, the whole of the human race is one family.

We in England have a government objective. The government said that we are now going to follow the community. I have argued that we need to substitute the word family for community. There are 7.3 billion people on this globe. Each one is unique, no two are alike, we can meet thousands of people better than you, thousands of people worse than you but we cannot meet anybody like you. That is the inter-faith context in which we should work. Each life is precious so in every Sikh congregation, in the individual supplication and the congregational supplication, we have to invoke blessings for all of humankind – Sarbat da bhala – wish everyone well. Thus, while highly distinct as a tradition, the Sikh Dharam holds a profound spirit of universality at its core.

The *Nostra Aetate* declaration resonates extremely

“Protect the Earth, Dignify Humanity” The Moral Dimensions of Climate Change and Sustainable Development, held at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Vatican City, Rome, April 2015

well with, and endorses, the Sikhs’ ethos and psyche. In fact, the development of the Sikh inter-faith mindset and the *Nostra Aetate* declaration are crucial milestones in a long sequence of inter-faith encounters and dialogues that have occurred over millennia. Over 2,000 years ago, Emperor Asoka, in India, issued an edict that there should be contact between religions. These edicts are built on rock – these are rock edicts. He said that the contact between religions is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others.

In the 13th century Saint Francis of Assisi travelled to the Middle East, meeting Muslim leaders seeking peace and harmony. In 16th century India, the Mughal Emperor Akbar is known to have convened interreligious gatherings at his court. Of course, in 1965 we had *Nostra Aetate*.

It is assumed that the first event of modern times promoting interreligious dialogue and understanding was the Parliament of the World’s Religions which took place in 1893 in Chicago. Subsequent parliaments were held in 1993, 1999, 2004, 2009, and recently in 2015. We can see that, particularly over the last century, the interreligious movement has grown significantly with countless interreligious conferences, gatherings and initiatives having taken place and continuing to do so, pointing to the growing desire of humanity to cooperate





Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize Award presented to Bhai Sahib, Bhai Mohinder Singh Ji by Hofstra President Stuart Rabinowitz

and collaborate for the common good. Observing this rich and promising legacy of interreligious initiatives over all of this time including, of course, the formation of KAICIID in 2012, it seems natural to ask: “Where do we stand today?”

Based on my short 15 years of experience and engagement in interreligious efforts, despite tremendous progress, there remains a need to enhance, expand and accelerate this movement. Interreligious dialogue, to be effective, needs to be genuinely supported, especially financially. It must be encouraged, reinforced and strengthened but, even more important than this, inter-faith dialogue and cooperation must go beyond declarations and lead to concrete action.

There is a need for individuals, we as faith-believers, to remain genuinely and seriously true to the common religious principles of self-transformation through constant prayer. The day you miss prayer, you have missed something else. You must have constant prayer and selfless service and good inter-faith education. This needs to begin at home within families and to continue through schools and institutes of higher education and should ultimately guide politicians, legislators, governments and multilateral organisations. We have to be serious about faith. I keep saying that faith has been marginalised. We have to bring faith back into the equation.

We are living in a unique period of history. Global has become local and local has become global, where humanity has been, in a sense, squeezed and lumped together. Borders are shifting. At the same time, we have

amassed weapons of mass destruction. We could have guided missiles in the hands of misguided people. We have brilliant communication technologies, the internet and powerful media, but we have to get closer to humanity. Violent extremism, mass migration, financial crises, growing mistrust, human trafficking and exploitation, poverty and disease, lies, deceit and double standards, a lack of accountability and transparency are occurrences, catastrophes and challenges of our times.

In order to make progress, to create human flourishing, we need to nurture good human beings with value-lead education. Education begins at conception and continues during the nine months that we are unborn. We learn so much from our mothers during that time. Yet, we are living in an age and societies where divorce and fractured marriages are now far too common. In England, we have a population of 60 million and nine million people are single parents, two-thirds are divorcees, 30 percent of people are living together but not on talking terms. In such an environment, where will we learn compassion? Where will we learn sacrifice? We have to look and unpack the colossal impact that this has upon our families and communities.

The simple fact is that global issues require global solutions, and global solutions require us to recognise that we have shared responsibilities. Each one of 7.3 billion people has a shared responsibility for this planet. And it is these shared responsibilities that compel us to share wisdom through broadening interreligious dialogue and collaboration, which is in fact the essence of *Nostra Aetate*.

Talking of responsibilities, from a very early age, I used to say that we have a universal declaration of rights, but there is no universal declaration of responsibilities. Why not? To my utter delight and surprise a universal declaration of human responsibilities was drafted by the Interaction Council in 1997. Who were these people? They were predominantly ex-prime ministers and ex-presidents who came up with 19 articles in 1997.

In 1998, 50 years after the formation of UN, they wanted to piggy-back this universal declaration of human responsibilities onto a universal declaration

of rights. Unfortunately, it was not adopted for some reason. I think that we need to rediscover and re-energise such a declaration.

I will read just one article from amongst the 19. This concerns non-violence and respect for life. It states that every person has a responsibility to respect life. No one has the right to injure, torture or kill another person. This does not exclude the right to defend individuals or communities. Thou shalt not kill – that was one of the articles. But I am sure lots of the governments will say: “Oh, no, no, what will happen to all of the armaments that we are manufacturing? What will happen to all of these wars?”

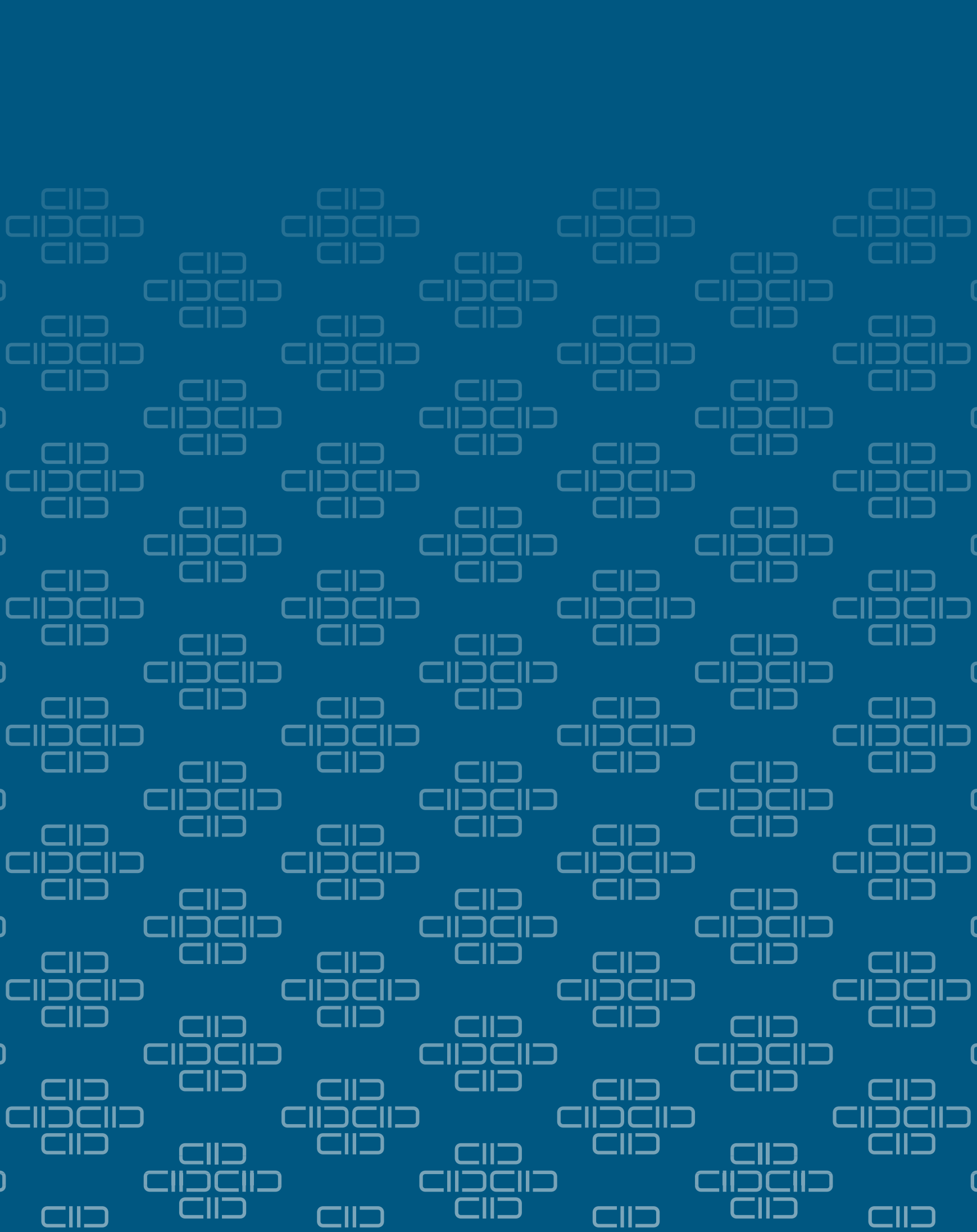
I remember reading when I was young: “If you want peace, be prepared for war.” I told my dad that I couldn’t understand this. He said: “This is simple logic, my son. They are trying to brainwash you.” If you want peace, you should be prepared for peace, for goodness sake.

Then there was another poster that I read: “Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet.” I said: “My goodness, dad, what is this?” He said: “You should not be reading these posters.” I said: “But dad, I don’t understand what a cigar is.” I knew what a cigarette was. He said: “You will not touch a cigarette or tobacco at all.” We are easily brainwashed by media but we must think in an original, innovative way. Our Sikh scriptures are a rich legacy – we just need to read them over and over and over again and interpret them for the common good.

Thank you.

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh addressing the United Nations General Assembly, New York, during 2012 World Inter-faith Harmony Week





Chapter V

Nostra Aetate – creating a culture of inclusion





Nostra Aetate – creating a culture of inclusion

His Excellency, Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mccj

His Excellency Bishop Miguel Ayuso is Titular Bishop of Luperciana, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Bishop Ayuso has always been active in interreligious dialogue, teaching in both Cairo and Rome as well as writing several important publications on issues related to Christian-Muslim dialogue. As a priest he worked in the local Church in Egypt and Sudan from 1982 to 2002.

He served as President during his service at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI). He also taught courses in interreligious dialogue and participated in meetings and conferences on interreligious relations in various countries in Africa, Asia, Australia and Europe. In addition to his native Spanish, Bishop Ayuso speaks Arabic, English, French and Italian.

Career summary

- ❖ Member of the Comboni Missionaries
- ❖ 1980: Ordination as priest
- ❖ 1982–2002: Served as parish priest in Sacred Heart Parish in Abbassiyya/Cairo as well as Director of the Pastoral, Liturgical and Catechetical Centre of El Obeid Diocese/Sudan
- ❖ 2000: Awarded PhD in Theology by the Faculty of Theology of Granada, Spain
- ❖ 2005–2012: President of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI)
- ❖ 2012–present: Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue
- ❖ 2016: Ordained Bishop, Titular See of Luperciana, by Pope Francis.

Bishop Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, mccj, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue





Excellencies, distinguished guests, dear friends.

It is, for me, really a pleasure to share with you as we conclude our time together, a brief reflection on the significance of the final conciliar declaration *Nostra Aetate* which, in my opinion, bears witness to the opening and, to use a term dear to Pope Francis, to the mercy with which the Catholic Church has looked – and continues to look – at life in our world.

I thank all of you who are here and who have shared, this afternoon, moments of reflection that were, I believe, a tangible sign of the willingness of the Catholic Church to dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other religious traditions, as advocated by *Nostra Aetate*.

I could summarise in two words what we have been sharing together in this rich presentation and discussion. What we have proclaimed is just our desire to live in unity in diversity. It is true that in these 50 years much has been accomplished but much still remains to be done. Although many words have been spoken, there have also been, and there are still, too many silences. The path indicated by *Nostra Aetate* is still a very demanding one and, as we read further in this Declaration, we continue to be urged to recognise, preserve and advance all of the spiritual, moral and socio-cultural values found in religions.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, of which I am the Secretary, is aware of its debt to all of those Council Fathers – 2,221 fathers to be exact – who on 28 October 50 years ago, with great courage and foresight, approved the declaration *Nostra Aetate*. We are also indebted to all of those who in the past 50 years, from whatever religion to which they belonged, have promoted interreligious dialogue.

Let me also thank the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), for all of the efforts made towards the promotion of interreligious dialogue and for the many different initiatives that support people of different religions to come together in this hub, to get to know each other and to learn to work together for the good of humanity.

Nostra Aetate urged that encounters between believers, like this one today, have a clear identity and a spirit of respect, esteem and collaboration. In this regard I would like to recall here what was said by His Eminence Cardinal Tauran at the inauguration of the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID), when he expressed the hope that our initiatives would be conducted with “vision, honesty and credibility” (Vienna, 26 November 2012).

In these times, which are for many reasons dark and difficult, I believe that the purpose of interreligious dialogue is to take a common path towards the truth. This journey needs to take into account the following aspects: the identity of the person who is dialoguing; that one must not talk ambiguously; that each must pay attention to the other; that those who pray and think differently from me are not an enemy; and that the intentions of each must be sincere.

We must undoubtedly strengthen the fruitful cooperation among us believers of different religions on issues of common interest for the good of the human family and of our common home.

It is necessary to preserve the universal spirit with which Pope Francis speaks in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*: “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity” (*Laudato Si'*, n. 201). So here I think that we may find a roadmap to proceed together.

I think I can say that the years ahead will see the Catholic Church even more committed in responding to the great challenge of interreligious dialogue. In 50 years since *Nostra Aetate* much has been achieved but there is still a long way to go. 50 years ago the Declaration opened a door that, clearly, has not been closed. Indeed, the Council document is still an encouragement for all of us to never close the door or window, and for us to use the words of Father Neuhaus. Its message is timeless; let me bring some points to mind:

- ❖ The growing interdependence of peoples (cfr. n. 1)
- ❖ The human search for the meaning of life, suffering and death
- ❖ The profound human questions which remain valid because of their permanence – we are all human beings (cfr. n. 1)
- ❖ The common origin and the only destiny of humanity (cfr. n. 1)
- ❖ The unicity of the human family (cfr. n. 1) within the various ethnic groups and cultures (cfr. n. 1)
- ❖ That religions are a search for God or the Absolute.

These are words from *Nostra Aetate* and are a very, very challenging and timeless message that we have received from this Declaration.

We know now more than ever that interreligious dialogue is significant and irreplaceable. It is, among other things, a prerequisite for peace, a vital condition for everyone, as well as an object of longing of every human heart, of every religion which, with its religious and human heritage, it can greatly help to achieve.

Let me conclude with the words that Pope Francis addressed to the participants at the recent General Interreligious Audience in St. Peter's Square on 28 October 2015.

His first recommendation was prayer. We are facing difficult times. Pope Francis says continually that we are living in a world divided into many pieces scattered here and there; that we are living through a dark moment in our history in which dialogue has therefore become a necessity. This dialogue comes through and with prayer, to be achieved through our respective religious traditions. And, as believers, we also have to pray on high to God to ask his help as we confront the problems of humanity. "Dear brothers and sisters, as for the future of interreligious dialogue, the first thing we have to do is pray, and pray for one another: we are brothers and sisters!"

His second recommendation called for us to have mutual respect, each for the other, working together for the common good. So here we have a really beautiful roadmap to continue celebrating the message of *Nostra Aetate*. But let me end with what the Pope told us in St. Peter's Square: "We can walk together taking care of one another and of creation – all believers of every religion. Together we can praise the Creator for giving us the garden of the world to till and keep as a common good, and we can achieve shared plans to overcome poverty and to ensure for every man and woman the conditions for a dignified life." (General Interreligious Audience, October 28, 2015).

Thank you very much.

*Bishop Miguel Ayuso in front of the mural
"Followers of God" (1978) sited at the entrance to
the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*



NOSTRA AETATE

“the leaven of good”

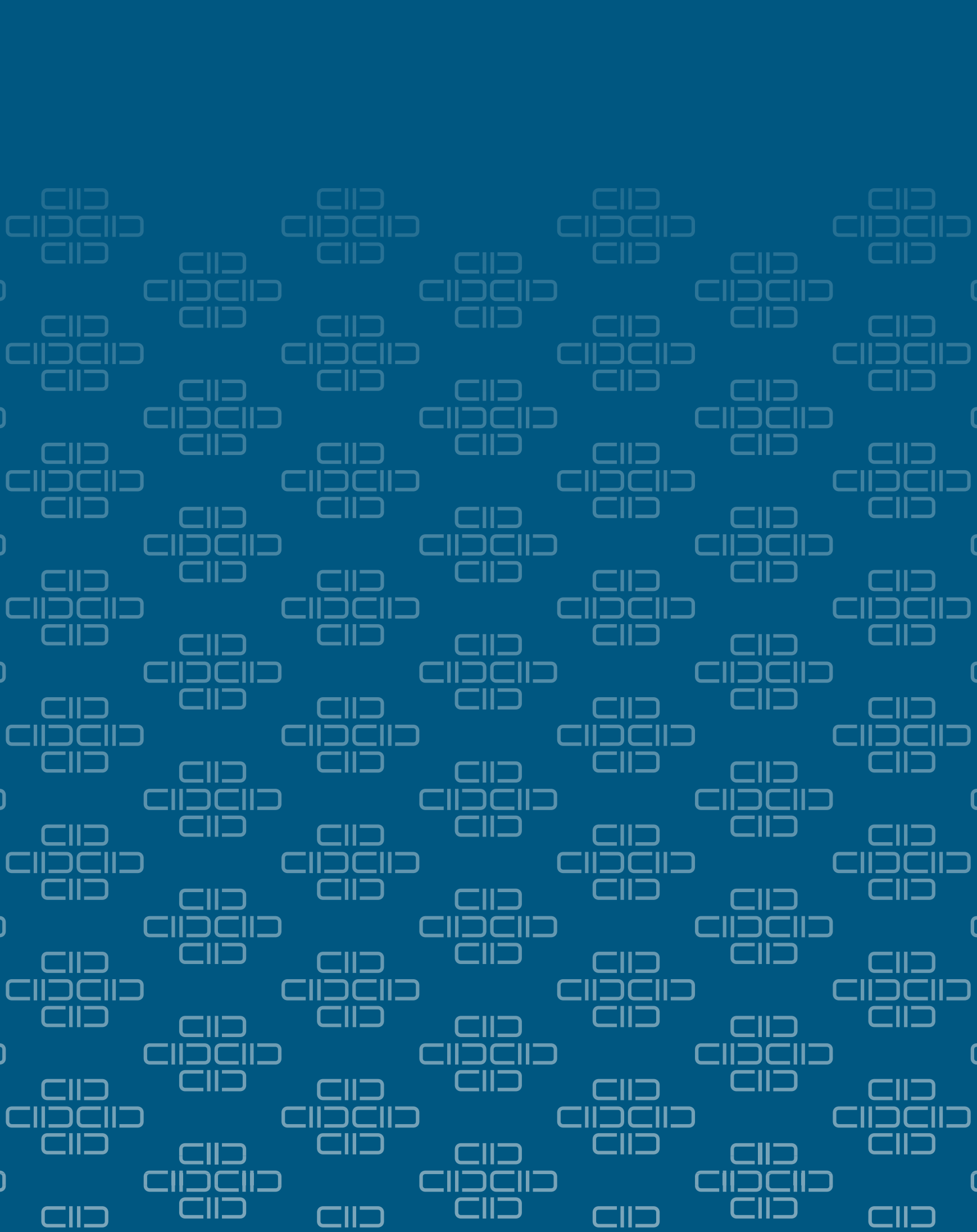


50th

Anniversary

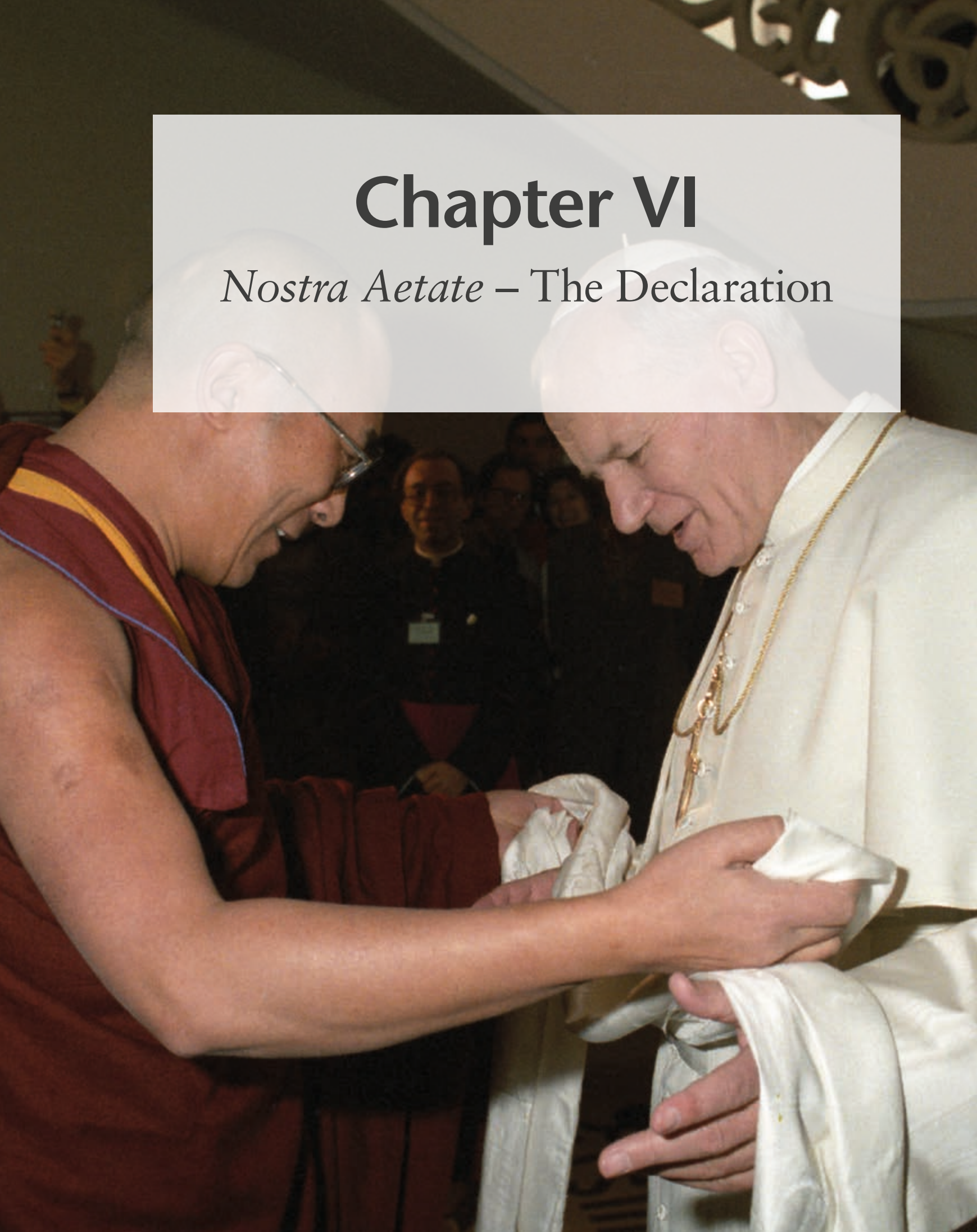
28th October
2015

Pontifical Council for
Interreligious Dialogue



Chapter VI

Nostra Aetate – The Declaration



Nostra Aetate – The Declaration

Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965

I In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions. In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.

One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth¹. One also is their final goal, God. His providence, His manifestations of goodness, His saving design extend to all men², until that time when the elect will be united in the Holy City, the city ablaze with the glory of God, where the nations will walk in His light³.

Men expect from the various religions answers to the unsolved riddles of the human condition, which today, even as in former times, deeply stir the hearts of men: What is man? What is the meaning, the aim of our life? What is moral good, what is sin? Whence suffering and what purpose does it serve? Which is the road to true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? What, finally, is that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence: whence do we come, and where are we going?

II From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through

searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realises the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing “ways,” comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself⁴.

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.

III The Church regards with esteem also the Muslims. They adore the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth⁵, who has spoken to men; they take pains to submit wholeheartedly to even His inscrutable decrees, just as Abraham, with whom the faith of Islam takes pleasure in linking itself, submitted to God. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary, His virgin Mother; at

times they even call on her with devotion. In addition, they await the day of judgment when God will render their deserts to all those who have been raised up from the dead. Finally, they value the moral life and worship God especially through prayer, almsgiving and fasting.

Since in the course of centuries not a few quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this sacred synod urges all to forget the past and to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom.

IV As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ – Abraham's sons according to faith⁶ – are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles⁷. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself⁸.

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "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 is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4–5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's mainstay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognise the time of her visitation⁹, nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading¹⁰. Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of

the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues – such is the witness of the Apostle¹¹. In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9)¹².

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ¹³; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

V We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ,

any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to “maintain good fellowship among the nations” (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men¹⁴, so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven¹⁵.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. Acts 17:26
- 2 Cf. Wis. 8:1; Acts 14:17; Rom. 2:6–7; 1 Tim. 2:4
- 3 Cf. Apoc. 21:23f.
- 4 Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18–19
- 5 Cf. St. Gregory VII, letter XXI to Anzir (Nacir), King of Mauritania (Pl. 148, col. 450f.)
- 6 Cf. Gal. 3:7
- 7 Cf. Rom. 11:17–24
- 8 Cf. Eph. 2:14–16
- 9 Cf. Lk. 19:44
- 10 Cf. Rom. 11:28
- 11 Cf. Rom. 11:28–29; cf. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (Light of Nations) AAS, 57 (1965) pg. 20
- 12 Cf. Is. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11–32
- 13 Cf. John. 19:6
- 14 Cf. Rom. 12:18
- 15 Cf. Matt. 5:45



KAICIID
CID
DIALOGUE
CENTRE

