



60 years of Nostra Aetate: from a seed of hope a great tree has grown

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Participants from numerous countries and various religious traditions gathered at the international symposium "Nostra Aetate: 60 Years Later" held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. Cardinal George Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and one of the speakers, emphasized that interreligious dialogue must receive greater attention on the international stage and that the spirit of Nostra Aetate remains essential for contemporary peacebuilding efforts.

"Interreligious dialogue needs more space in the international arena, in the policymaking, because religion has an important role to play," Cardinal George Koovakad, Prefect of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, told Vatican News. He was among the speakers at the symposium "Nostra Aetate: 60 Years Later," organized at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. The meeting, held on 18–19 November, brought together representatives of different religions from around the world.

On those days, representatives of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the Catholic Church reflected on the crucial role of religion and its capacity to move hearts toward peace and reconciliation. Participants also visited the Great Synagogue located in Rome's former Jewish quarter and the Great Mosque of Rome. These visits offered opportunities for prayer and dialogue.

Religion moves hearts

The symposium was academic in character and featured presentations by representatives of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Catholicism. The discussions focused on the declaration Nostra Aetate and its influence on reconciliation.

"All conflicts and other problems are rooted in the absence of peace, justice, and reconciliation. Religious leaders have a vital role to play in the world, as they can contribute to building peace," said Prof. Philip Goyret of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, one of the co-organizers of the symposium.

Great figures of reconciliation

Hiroshi Munehiro Kiwano, grandson of Nikkyō Niwano—who, at the invitation of Pope Paul VI, contributed to the development of Nostra Aetate—shared his grandfather's memories and message. "Christians pray for Buddhists, and Buddhists pray for Christians; we need more days like this in the future," he said.

Other key figures who contributed to Nostra Aetate were also remembered. "Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, together with Cardinal Augustin Bea, played a decisive role in fostering Christian–Jewish dialogue during the Second Vatican Council," noted Rabbi Ariel Stofenmacher, Rector of the Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires and founder of the Isaac Abarbanel University Institute.

He added that the symposium itself constitutes "a clear testimony to the deep trust that has

developed between the Catholic Church and Judaism over the past sixty years. This relationship has matured thanks to the commitment of Popes and rabbis dedicated to deepening dialogue."

Mercy unites people

Imam Nader Akkad of the Great Mosque of Rome presented the fundamental principles of Islam and their role in society. He underscored that the word "mercy," so frequently invoked in the Qur'an, is also a central theme in other religions and serves as a bond among people. Responding to questions during the debate, he observed that "there are many prejudices about Islam because people know the religion from newspapers rather than from having read the Qur'an." He encouraged participants to learn about each religion from its sources.

Dialogue as a seed of hope

The symposium concluded with a keynote address by Cardinal George Koovakad on the global state of interreligious dialogue. "More than half a century ago, a seed of hope for interreligious dialogue was sown. Your presence today is a testimony that it has grown into a tall tree with magnificent branches. The spirit of the Nostra Aetate Declaration is greatly needed today," he said. Cardinal Koovakad also noted that Nostra Aetate, developed with the cooperation of representatives of various faith traditions, initiated sustained efforts toward dialogue and became a groundbreaking document of global significance.

The international symposium was organized by the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross together with the Abarbanel University Institute (Buenos Aires), in collaboration with the Abraham J. Heschel Center for Catholic–Jewish Relations at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, and the Embassy of Argentina to the Holy See.

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