A Journey of Hope

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Sixty Years of Interreligious Dialogue and Fraternity in the Light of the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate.

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I. Introduction

1. On 28 October 1965, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* "on the relation of the Church with non-Christian religions" opened a new chapter in the history of relations among Catholics, Jews, and believers of other faiths and spiritual traditions. Far more than a mere text, it marked a profound change in the Church's understanding and expression of her relationship with followers of other religions. In that Declaration, the Church explicitly affirmed that she "rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions," inviting the faithful to regard with esteem and respect "the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines."[1] Written amid the creative and fraternal vitality of the Council, it remains highly relevant in a world marked, on the one hand, by widespread attitudes of closed-mindedness and, on the other, by a search for a peaceful coexistence within a universal citizenship founded on fraternity and mutual recognition.

2. Seen in this light, *Nostra Aetate* aligns with the other conciliar Declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*, which focuses on the right to religious freedom. No respectful relationship with other religions can be sincere or feasible without a corresponding respect for the religious freedom of others: "This

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demand for freedom in human society chiefly regards the quest for the values proper to the human spirit. It regards, in the first place, the free exercise of religion in society."[2] This conviction leads us to call for the same freedom for Christians living in countries where they are a minority.[3]

3. Sixty years after its promulgation, *Nostra Aetate* continues to inspire the Church's pastoral and theological orientations and to nourish the dialogue that is the very form in which human life unfolds, and which has become all the more indispensable in the societies of our time. Such dialogue, however, also constitutes an abiding challenge: How can fidelity to Christian identity be reconciled with a sincere openness to otherness? How can the call to universal fraternity be lived concretely in societies marked by increasing cultural and religious diversity, by war and violence, and by a growing trend toward secularization? This commemorative document seeks to retrace the essential stages of interreligious dialogue since *Nostra Aetate*, to assess its achievements and challenges, and to outline some perspectives for the future.

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[1] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (28 October 1965), par. 2: AAS 58 (1966), 741.
[2] Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration *Dignitatis Humanae* (7 December 1965), par. 1: AAS 58 (1966), 929-930.
[3] Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), par. 253: AAS 105 (2013), 1121.