



# The Task of Nostra Aetate Is Not Yet Completed

01/12/2025 | Sarah Bernstein

**During the celebration of the 60th anniversary of Nostra Aetate, in Rome on October 28, 2025, Sarah Bernstein shared this message of hope, truth, and responsibility, speaking about the situation in the Holy Land and the urgent need for dialogue even in times of pain and uncertainty.**

Shalom, Salaam, Good evening.

It was my first day at university. I walked into my room and immediately saw a crucifix my roommate had hung on the wall. I was horrified. Here I was, a 19 year old Jewish girl, and I had to sleep in a room with a crucifix? I considered changing rooms; I called my mother who said “You’ll be fine” - and so I took a deep breath and got to know Caroline, a devout Catholic. Our friendship overcame my fears. Dialogue begins with relationship, but I’ve seen that the connections that survive times of crisis are those built on honest conversations, however hard. The work is to address our most sensitive and instinctive reactions, like the threat I felt when I saw the crucifix.

Nostra Aetate was a brave, revolutionary call to struggle with deeply held negative beliefs about other faiths. As a Jew, I am profoundly grateful for it. The interreligious challenges sometimes feel overwhelming – but Nostra Aetate taught us that dialogue must work through the burning realities of our day, even if we might prefer to avoid them. In Israel-Palestine that means we have to address our national differences, as well as religious. Nostra Aetate emphasized the Jewish background of Jesus, Mary and the apostles. For Palestinian Christians today, the Jew is the Israeli soldier who stops and searches them at a checkpoint. Context is everything.

Since October 7th 2023, despair has been an ever-present temptation. I’ve felt profound grief for those killed and taken hostage, anguish at the devastation in Gaza, and shame at the moral blindness within my society. I’m immensely troubled by the rise in Jewish extremist attacks on Christians and Muslims and their religious sites. They betray the foundations of who we are as Jews. They are wrong. I’m also dismayed about the global rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The task of Nostra Aetate is not yet completed.

At the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue, our Jewish, Christian, and Muslim team brings Israelis and Palestinians together to listen, learn and heal. Even during this terrible war our “Healing Hatred” methodology, rooted in tools of spiritual counselling, has helped us sustain dialogue when in so many places in the world it has broken down. In the spirit of Nostra Aetate, we face up to the deeply held beliefs that divide us. Each training course, whether for religious leaders or educators, each workshop where adults or children are taught to respect rather than hate, each expression of empathy—these practical acts change our reality. As one participant said, “You can google Christmas, but you can’t google making friends with your enemy.”

The Palestinian intellectual Edward Said taught “Where cruelty and injustice are concerned, hopelessness is submission.” To give up would be to collude with the darkness. We must resist despair—we must insist on hope as a moral imperative. Hope is not only a feeling. It is a series of actions—a conscious daily decision to keep working for change even when the odds seem impossible. For me, as an Israeli Jew in 2025, that is the lesson of Nostra Aetate.

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Editorial Notes

**Sarah Bernstein** is the Executive Director of the Rossing Center for Education and Dialogue in Jerusalem. Born in the UK, with a background in law and mediation, Sarah has worked in the field of peace-building and coexistence work since 2000, specializing in interreligious dialogue. She was awarded her Ph.D. in Peace and Reconciliation Studies by Coventry University (England) for her thesis on *Narratives of Belonging: Life Stories of Jewish-Israeli Women in Jerusalem* (2011).

Source: Intervention at the celebration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* in Rome on October 28, 2025. Text kindly provided by the author. A video of her presentation is available on [YouTube](#).

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