

MILESTONES IN MODERN CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS - 1



Milestones in Modern Catholic-Jewish Relations

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“... you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in ... to share the rich root of the olive tree ... remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.” (Romans 11:17-18)

Since the Second World War, the Catholic Church has been involved in a deliberate process of rethinking its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. Especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Catholic-Jewish relations have improved tremendously—on local, national and international levels.

As several Jewish and Catholic leaders have noted, there have probably been more positive encounters between Jews and Catholics in the last sixty years than in the previous fifteen hundred. These years have been a time of renewal, hope and growing cooperation between these two faiths evidenced by the multitude of Catholic-Jewish dialogue groups, organizations and institutions that have emerged throughout the world since Vatican II.

The following listing of events provides a taste of how relations between Catholics and Jews have been changing and developing in recent decades – and this is a journey that has only just begun.

1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg: An international conference of Jews, Protestants and Catholics, gathered in Switzerland to confront the reality of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, issues a series of ten principles to guide Christian teaching and preaching when referring to Jews and Judaism. (<http://tinyurl.com/adpdn38>)

1959 Good Friday Prayer: Pope John XXIII modifies the intercessory prayer for the Jews in the Church’s Good Friday liturgy by suppressing the term “perfidious (faithless, unbelieving) Jews.” Over the years, the prayer continues to undergo revision to bring it more in keeping with the renewal in Church teaching about the Jews and Judaism. (<http://tinyurl.com/apdyhh>)

1960 Pope John XXIII and Jules Isaac: Jules Isaac, a noted French Jewish historian, presents Pope John XXIII with historical documentation on Christian anti-Judaism and attitudes which contributed to the Holocaust. (<http://tinyurl.com/aupaju3>)

1965 Vatican II and *Nostra Aetate*: Called by Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) issues *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.) *Nostra Aetate* No. 4 addresses the issue of Christian attitudes towards the Jewish people. This document marks the end of a long era in the history of Catholic-Jewish relations and the beginning of a new age of dialogue between the two ancient communities. (<http://tinyurl.com/k4dj>)

1974 New Vatican Commission: What was formerly the Office for Catholic- Jewish Relations – created in 1966 and attached to the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity – is renamed the Holy See’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. (<http://tinyurl.com/ad4olpu>)

1974 “Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4):” This Vatican document proposes some concrete suggestions born of experience to help to promote in the life of the Church the attitudes towards the Jewish people articulated in the 1965 declaration *Nostra Aetate* No.4. In particular, this document encourages Christians to “acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of Judaism and to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in light of their own religious experience.” (<http://tinyurl.com/3ennl>)

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1978 Karol Wojtyla elected Pope: From the beginning of his twenty-six year pontificate, the newly elected Pope-John Paul II-sets out to build a new relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. (<http://tinyurl.com/aftxzpu>)

1980 Pope John Paul II – A Covenant Never Revoked: Addressing the Jewish community in Mainz, West Germany, John Paul II insists on the eternal validity of God's covenant with the Jews, a theme repeated in subsequent Church teachings. (<http://tinyurl.com/b57wd8j>)

1985 “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church”: This Vatican document provides a helpful reference for those who teach and preach about Jews and Judaism and wish to do so in accord with the current teaching of the Church. (<http://tinyurl.com/2abxt>)

1986 Pope John Paul II Visits Rome Synagogue: John Paul II becomes the first Pope in history to visit Rome's chief synagogue. In his speech he reiterates the Second Vatican Council's condemnation of all discrimination toward the Jews and states: “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.” (<http://tinyurl.com/apqgebp>)

1993 Israel-Vatican Accord: Israel and the Vatican establish full diplomatic ties, easing decades of diplomatic tensions between the two states. (<http://tinyurl.com/a2agp9n>)

1997 Vatican Symposium “Roots of Anti-Judaism in the Christian Milieu”: Addressing the symposium, John Paul II says, “In the Christian world ... erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people ... have circulated too long engendering feelings of hostility toward this people.” (<http://tinyurl.com/bcu2ljx>)

1998 “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah”: In a long-awaited document on the Holocaust, the Church expresses repentance for those Christians who failed to oppose the Nazi persecution of the Jews. (<http://tinyurl.com/349dt>)

2000 Visit of Pope John Paul II to Israel: Following a Lenten liturgy in which he prayed for God's forgiveness “for those who have caused these children [the Jews] to suffer” Pope John Paul II undertakes a historic visit to Israel, during which he visits Judaism's holiest site, the Western Wall (<http://tinyurl.com/amb5aw5>), and places in the Wall a copy of his Lenten prayer (<http://tinyurl.com/p55jnf4>).

2000-2002 Historic scholarly documents: In 2000, an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars issues Dabru Emet (<http://tinyurl.com/8r64o5b>), a consensus document offering eight suggestions about how Jews and Christians might better relate to one another. In 2002, the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations publishes its response to Dabru Emet, entitled “A Sacred Obligation” (<http://tinyurl.com/aeweugb>).

2002 “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”: The Pontifical Biblical Commission publishes a thorough study of the relationship between the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures. The document notes that Christians have much to learn from Jewish interpretation of the Bible and confronts the problem of anti-Jewish passages in the New Testament. (<http://tinyurl.com/mt3e>)

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2002 Bilateral Commission of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and the Holy See: As a result of Pope John Paul's visit to the State of Israel in 2000, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See established a joint commission which has continued to meet annually, to address topics of shared concern, and to strengthen the relationship between the Vatican and the religious leadership of Israel. Together they have explored the role of Scripture in each faith's central teachings, the sanctity of human life, freedom of conscience, religious education and other significant matters. (<http://tinyurl.com/ad3b56f>)

2005 Joseph Ratzinger elected Pope: As a cardinal, Pope Benedict had been a close collaborator with Pope John Paul II in many of his historic interfaith initiatives and writings. In his homily for the Mass inaugurating his papacy, the new Pope specifically mentioned the Jews among those to whom he extended greetings: "With great affection I also greet ... you, my brothers and sisters of the Jewish people, to whom we are joined by a great shared spiritual heritage, one rooted in God's irrevocable promises" (<http://tinyurl.com/dy5oh>). His first official correspondence as Pope was a letter of congratulations to the Chief Rabbi-emeritus of Rome's Great Synagogue, Dr. Elio Toaff, on the occasion of his 90th birthday (<http://tinyurl.com/ar2ezvp>).

2005-2010 Pope Benedict visits three synagogues: In August 2005, as part of his pilgrimage to Germany for World Youth Day, the Pope visited the synagogue of Cologne, where he said: "We must come to know one another much more and much better. Consequently, I would encourage sincere and trustful dialogue between Jews and Christians ... Our rich common heritage and our fraternal and more trusting relations call upon us to join in giving an ever more harmonious witness" (<http://tinyurl.com/9epqx>). On April 28, 2008, Pope Benedict was the guest of Rabbi Arthur Schneier and the congregation of Park East Synagogue. In his remarks, the Pope said: "I find it moving to recall that Jesus, as a young boy, heard the words of Scripture and prayed in a place such as this," and he encouraged everyone present "to continue building bridges of friendship" (<http://tinyurl.com/b4gnr86>). In January 2010, Pope Benedict marked Italy's annual "Day for Judaism" by visiting the main synagogue of Rome, repeating the historic visit first made by his predecessor. There, he invited Jews and Christians to come together to proclaim the religious and ethical teachings they share: "Reawakening in our society openness to the transcendent dimension, witnessing to the one God, is a precious service which Jews and Christians can offer together ... Bearing witness together to the supreme value of life against all selfishness, is an important contribution to a new world where justice and peace reign ..." (<http://tinyurl.com/b46wszs>).

2005 Papal recommitment to the vision of *Nostra Aetate*: On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*'s promulgation, Pope Benedict wrote: "The Jewish-Christian dialogue must continue to enrich and deepen the bonds of friendship which have developed, while preaching and catechesis must be committed to ensuring that our mutual relations are presented in the light of the principles set forth by the Council" (<http://tinyurl.com/an8pkmj>).

2007 Pope quotes Jewish rabbi-scholar in his own book about Jesus: In April, Pope Benedict published the first volume in a trilogy, "Jesus of Nazareth". In it, he quotes extensively from a 1993 book by Rabbi Jacob Neusner, a distinguished scholar of Judaism, called *A Rabbi Talks With Jesus* (<http://tinyurl.com/agt7ac>).

2009 Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Israel and the Palestinian Territories: From May 8 to 15, Pope Benedict visited the Holy Land, meeting with religious and political leaders in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories, visiting major Jewish sites and expressing the solidarity of the Catholic Church with the peoples of that region (<http://tinyurl.com/b8bjtgy>).

2009 International Council of Christians and Jews issues “A Time For Recommitment” (The Twelve Points of Berlin): More than sixty years after the ICCJ published its seminal “Ten Points of Seelisberg,” the “Twelve Points of Berlin” is issued in July, as an attempt to address key topics in Jewish-Christian relations in the light of the considerable progress in this dialogue, and to provide guiding principles for the future (<http://tinyurl.com/cccarh5>).

2011 25th anniversary of Pope John Paul II’s Assisi Day of Prayer: On October 25, Pope Benedict reprised his predecessor’s historic interreligious gathering in Assisi, by inviting the world’s religious leaders to come together again, and to pray for peace in the world. Three hundred religious representatives accepted his invitation (<http://tinyurl.com/d35yf8z>). In speaking of the shared religious aspiration of peace, Pope Benedict said: “We will continue to be united in this journey, in dialogue, in the daily building of peace and in our commitment to a better world, a world in which every man and woman and every people can live in accordance with their own legitimate aspirations” (<http://tinyurl.com/csckq4p>).

2013 Historic Papal Transition: Pope Benedict XVI resigns the papacy on February 28 (<http://tinyurl.com/cob3ta6>). On March 13, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio is elected as Pope Francis (<http://tinyurl.com/cjpr9ap>). One of the new Pope’s first acts is to send a message to Rome’s Jewish community, informing them of his election, and inviting their presence for his installation Mass (<http://tinyurl.com/d9oetew>).

It was quickly revealed that Pope Francis had a longstanding and warm relationship with Argentina’s Jewish community, and had published a book of his conversations with Rabbi Abraham Skorka, a close friend and colleague [in English: *On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, 2013] (<http://tinyurl.com/cdssgbj>).

2014 Papal visit to the Holy Land: From May 24 to 26, Pope Francis pays his first papal visit to the Holy Land, visiting Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, accompanied by his good friend Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Omar Abboud, a leader of the Muslim community in Argentina. The Pope’s visit was intended to promote a message of peace, reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. It also specifically marked the fiftieth anniversary of the historic visit of Pope Paul VI to Israel, when that Pope met Athenagoras, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. (<http://tinyurl.com/opzx39j>)

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