

God's Love for People of All Faiths



God's Love for All People

It's no secret: God has a thing for each one of us. He loves us more than we can possibly imagine. After all, he created us. He knows us inside and out. Whether or not we are aware of it, we share an intimate relationship with our Creator—even from before we were born. You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's

womb. I praise you, so wonderfully you made me; wonderful are your works! My very self you knew; my bones were not hidden from you, When I was being made in secret, fashioned as in the depths of the earth. Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be. Psalm 139:13-16

Sometimes it's hard to believe that God feels this way about all of us. But it's true; in fact it's the most true thing about us. If someone were to ask, who are you? we might respond, I'm the daughter of so and so, a student at such and such school, a member of this or that club. But the one thing that best describes who we are is that we are infinitely loved by God. So the next time you have to describe yourself, start with the number one descriptor: I am someone who is infinitely loved by God.

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God's love for all people holds true across time, culture, tradition, race, and creed: no one is outside of God's love. God's love is not only our main trait, it is also what connects us to everyone around us. We are all created by the same loving God, and we are all oriented toward God as our ultimate destination. God is present to all of us, and we run into his goodness and saving grace every day, whether or not we are even aware that it is God.

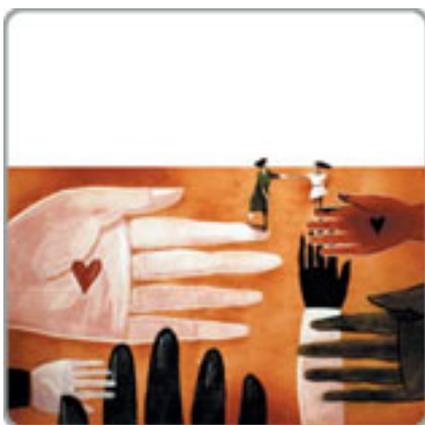
The Church wrote about this in the *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, or *Nostra Aetate*, a major document of the Second Vatican Council.

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. (*Nostra Aetate*, a. 2)

As Christians, we believe that this “certain power” or “Supreme Being” is best understood within the context of the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6), and human beings find the fullness of life in him. Having faith in Jesus Christ does not mean that we can disregard or disrespect other religions. On the contrary, the Church has said that other religions, though different from our own, often reflect “a ray of that Truth” which enlightens all human beings. (*Nostra Aetate*, a. 2)

The Church holds in special regard the people of Judaism and Islam. They share a special connection with Christians because the three religions trace their history through a common person: Abraham. Each religion believes in “the one God, living and subsisting in Himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth,” the one who has spoken to his people. (*Nostra Aetate*, a. 3)

The Church on Interreligious Dialogue



Far from merely tolerating other religious traditions, the Church calls us to engage in dialogue with other religious traditions. We are witnesses to our own religious tradition and also to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among” people of other religious traditions. (*Nostra Aetate*, a. 2)

The Church calls Christians to work with people of other religious traditions in order to better understand one another and to preserve and promote social justice, moral welfare, peace and freedom for all humankind (*Nostra Aetate* a. 3). Our goal, the Council fathers wrote, is to follow in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul by continuing “to ‘maintain good fellowship among the nations’ (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men, so that they may be truly sons of the Father who is in heaven.” (*Nostra Aetate*, a. 5)

Twenty-five years after *Nostra Aetate*, the Church revisited its commitment to interreligious dialogue. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue issued the statement *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (1991). The document studies the meaning of both dialogue and proclamation and their mutual relationship.

In January 2001 Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue in his apostolic letter *At the Beginning of the New Millennium*, or *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. The pope called for a continued “relationship of openness and dialogue with the followers of other religions” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, a. 55). He said that we must approach dialogue “with an attitude of profound willingness to listen” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, a. 56).

In October 2005 Pope Benedict XVI addressed a letter to the president of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*. The pope stated his commitment to follow in Pope John Paul II's footsteps and to work together to “offer an ever more compelling shared witness to the One God and his commandments, the sanctity of life, the promotion of human dignity, the rights of the family and the need to build a world of justice, reconciliation and peace for future generations” (*40th Anniversary of the Declaration, Nostra Aetate*).

Sources: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, May

19, 1991. Pope Benedict XVI, *40th Anniversary of the Declaration Nostra Aetate*, October 26, 2005. Pope John Paul II, *At the Beginning of the New Millennium (Novo Millennio Ineunte)*, May 19, 1991.

Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)*, October 28, 1965.

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