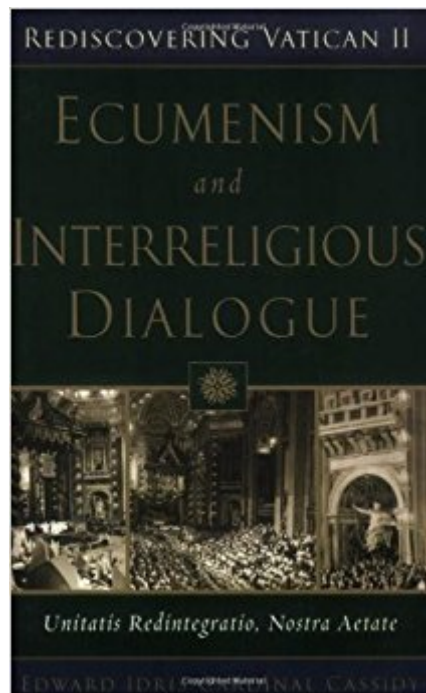


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# Ecumenism And Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate (Rediscovering Vatican II)



## Synopsis

Places the Council in dialogue with the church and her people and focuses on what Catholics need to know, not just historically. This first volume, of the eight-book series looks at the relationship of the Catholic Church with other Christian churches and other great religions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Cassidy's book, part of Paulist Press' "Rediscovering Vatican II" series, reviews the content, implementation, and current issues surrounding Unitatis Redintegratio (Ecumenism) and Nostra Aetate (Non-Christian Religions). His book is a useful overview of some contemporary issues in Catholicism related to these themes. Cassidy, an Australian cardinal, was for many years president of the ecumenism branch of the Vatican, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The PCPCU also manages the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. I like that Cassidy writes from experience, and that Paulist Press has chosen to have a variety of voices in this series other than just scholars. Before Vatican II, the Church did its best to keep away from Protestants. "Ecumenism" was a dirty word. When the World Council of Churches was founded, the Catholics stayed away. Interdenomination prayer was anathema. But at Vatican II, the bishops came out with ground-breaking ideas. The Protestants were no longer heretics but "separated brethren." The Catholic Church was to some extent also guilty for the historical divides. Non-Catholic baptisms are valid. Christ is at work in the Protestant churches as well. And most of all, we must dialogue and collaborate with Protestants, in both spiritual ways (prayer), doctrinal dialogue, and social

change. Yet how is the Church to balance its mission to both work with Protestants and try to unite them with the Church? To what extent does Christ work in their traditions if we believe Christ is most fully in the Catholic tradition? This was worked out more in John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*. John Paul wrote that ecumenism is not an appendix to the Catholic mission to evangelize, but an intrinsic part of it. God wills unity, much more than denomination competition, and we are to work toward unity in ways other than church mergers. He identified some key issues separating Catholics from Protestants: the relation of scripture and tradition, the Eucharist, ordination, Mary, and the magisterium and papal primacy. Does one side have the full truth on these issues (ours), or does the Spirit work through diversity as well as unity? Where do we find that balance?" Obviously spiritual ecumenism is more than prayer alone. It may be seen as an entire way of life in which one responds to the inner voice and movement of the Holy Spirit. A spiritual person listens to the abiding Spirit and directs his or her life accordingly, becoming selfless and fully dedicated to expressing this faith in action." (92)

*Nostra Aetate* is one of the shortest documents from Vatican II, but one of the most historically significant. It stemmed from and ushered in a radically different way of relating to other religions. The premise: all people seek truth, and our quests for truth become closer and closer in a world getting smaller and smaller. While we believe Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we must dialogue with other religious traditions. We must seek to learn about them and appreciate what is good and holy in their traditions, even preserve it. The Council originally planned to have a document about the Jews, but as the bishops discussed the document they extended it to all religions. The text has strong condemnations of anti-Semitism. And perhaps *Nostra Aetate*'s biggest historical impact has been on the Church and the Jews. John Paul II was famously the first pope to visit the synagogue in Rome, and had a long friendship with its head rabbi. John Paul, who saw the horrors of World War II and the Shoah, visited Auschwitz in 1979 and later moved a Carmelite convent off the Auschwitz grounds after Jews protested it. And in 1998, the Church published "We Remember," expressing deep sorrow for the Church's long heritage of anti-Semitism and the violence and persecution it led to. Still, issues remain to be discussed. How are we to read the Old Testament, as autonomous or as in need of fulfillment from the New? What is the meaning of Shoah? If the Mosaic covenant is still valid and the Jews are also the People of God, what makes us distinctive? Some Catholics still criticize the 2002 joint Jewish-Christian document *Covenant and Mission*, which effectively states we should cease trying to convert the Jews. Cassidy briefly covers how relations with other religions have improved as well. And there is ongoing clarification. In 1984, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue published *Dialogue and Mission*, describing how dialogue and mutual respect is a part of the kingdom of God. In DM, four types of dialogue are

enumerated: dialogues of life, deeds, reflections, and religious experience. Every Christian is called to this mission. John Paul II exemplified this in his Assisi meetings, which controversially had members of different religions praying together for peace. The balance to this is in the 1991 document Dialogue and Proclamation, which reinforces the fact that dialogue must not replace evangelization but must work hand-in-hand with it (confusing). We may learn from others in dialogue, but we may also help them see "seeds of the Word" in their tradition. Cassidy's strength here is his downfall. Because he was in charge of the Vatican's dialogue with Protestants, Orthodox, and Jews, he has lots of detail about various meetings and documents. But his coverage of non-Christian religions is pretty weak. For example, in discussions about Buddhism he fails to mention Christians' increased interest in Buddhism, the work of scholars at the Society for Buddhist-Christian studies, or even John Paul II's encyclical on Buddhist meditation, "On Some Aspects of Christian Meditation." I really wish he had given much more "on the ground" detail rather than just what happens at the Vatican. This book contrasts nicely with Acts of Faith, Eboo Patel's book I read recently. Patel expresses his frustration with religious leaders getting together at nice interfaith banquets and pontificating eloquently on the importance of dialogue without ever bringing parishioners into it. Cassidy's description of all the joint statements and meetings left me wondering: what's the point? I know religious leaders can be role models for the laypeople, but how many on-the-ground parishes actually follow the mission to dialogue? Anti-abortion protests garner lots of support from laypeople, but I haven't seen mass lay movements to visit mosques and temples. Perhaps it is time for someone to fill this vacuum.

Lets TalkThe text is presented in two halves; with each half dealing with one of these two documents from the Second Vatican Council. The reader is presented with an outline of some of the background to the formulation of each document and a chronological representation of the work done by the Church of Rome and other religions since the writing of the documents. The tone and certainly my impression of why people of different faiths should talk to each other is a positive one. Flaws in Interfaith dialogue were certainly identified but such truths were presented with "love". This is an easy to read document, written from a Catholic perspective. In reading the text, I felt encouraged to learn more. So much so that my next purchase was on this issue. I would recommend this text to Senior Students, parish groups, teachers and individuals who want to study a key area of the Second Vatican Council.

I enjoyed the information provided and learned the much more work still to be done. I give it a five

stars.

Educational Piece of material.

excellent

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