



5 points

from *Nostra Aetate*, n.4

With Vatican II's *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (*Nostra Aetate*: 'In our times') ushered in a new era of reconciliation for Christians and Jews. Key points from paragraph 4 follow:

1. Historically and spiritually, Jews and Christians share a common ancestry in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. Through the sacred Scriptures of the Jewish people (the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings) the Church received the revelation of the 'Old Testament.'

2. The Church emerged from the Jewish people. Jesus, Mary, the apostles, and others among the first Christians, were Jews.

3. The Jews remain God's chosen people, a people dear to God's heart. [In his 1980 speech in Mainz,

Germany, Pope John Paul II referred to the Jews as the people of the old covenant, "never revoked by God."]

4. The Jewish people are not to be held responsible for the death of Jesus.

Christian faith sees salvation through Christ as a gift of all-embracing love freely offered to (and never imposed on) all peoples.

Jewish-Christian dialogue is to be encouraged.

5. Anti-semitism is the antithesis of the gospel. Its appearance in any form, at any time or place, is tragic and totally unacceptable.

Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

"The New Testament writings were never presented as something entirely new. On the contrary, they attest their rootedness in the long religious experience of the people of Israel, an experience recorded in diverse forms in the sacred books which comprise the Jewish Scriptures. The New Testament recognizes their divine authority."

The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures
(Pontifical Biblical Commission, 2001)

A quiet revolution is underway as Christians rediscover their deep historical and spiritual links with the Jewish people after centuries of estrangement. This development was officially set in motion at the Second Vatican Council with the document *Nostra Aetate* and has continued to find expression in subsequent church statements and initiatives.

This leaflet series, *Light of Torah*, seeks to bring the influence of *Nostra Aetate* into the hearts and homes of parishioners. It does so by engaging Christians in Torah reflection. Each week, we explore a portion of the Torah (the first five books of the bible) while learning from Jewish sources and insights.



Genesis 44:18—47:27

Vayigash:
'he approached'



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Light of Torah is a ministry arising from the Catholic community. In the spirit of Vatican II's call to Jewish-Christian reconciliation, Light of Torah encourages Torah reflection in homes and parishes, drawing on the insights of Jewish interpretative traditions.

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Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Genesis 44:18–47:27

In this week's Torah portion we hear Joseph reveal to his estranged brothers: *"I am Joseph your brother"* (45:4). It is a statement that holds meaning for interreligious dialogue. At an historic meeting between Pope John XXIII and Jewish leaders at the time of Vatican II, Pope John (whose Christian name was Giuseppe, 'Joseph') opened his address with the words "I am Joseph your brother," marking a new era of reconciliation in Jewish-Christian relations.

1. Rashi: 11th C. Torah commentator. Bibliography: Goldstein, ed., *The Women's Torah Commentary* (Woodstock, 2000); Munk, *The Call of the Torah* (NY, 1994); *Nostra Aetate* (1965) www.vatican.va.

Tasting Torah

"I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold to Egypt" (Genesis 45:4).

Read through the whole of this reconciliation scene in 44:18-45:15. Read it again, and aloud, with a friend. Place yourself in the drama of the narrative and the emotion of the characters. What stands out to each of you? How does God's Word speak to the curiosity of your minds, to the movement of your hearts? As you ponder, let's hear from some of the revered commentators of Jewish tradition..

Touching Torah

The sages were fascinated by Judah's speech just prior to Joseph's self-disclosure:

"My Lord, please give your servant a hearing and do not let your anger flare up at your servant—for you are like Pharaoh" (44:18).

How do you understand Judah's words? Is he saying 'You are merciful like Pharaoh'? or 'You are cruel like Pharaoh'? Is Judah being politically wise, or risking foolhardy insolence? He certainly knows how to pull Joseph's heartstrings by mentioning their aged and lonely father. The sages present a variety of views ranging from Judah's absolute sincerity to his ability to gain the upper hand over Joseph. How do you view Judah's approach to Joseph? Note too the irony that Judah should beg to replace Benjamin as a slave to Joseph. Judah, who was the principal architect of the sale of Joseph into slavery, now proposes that he become Joseph's slave!

Depthing Torah

In the face of Joseph's revelation, his brothers are dumbfounded. *"They were unable to answer him—they recoiled in fear of him"* (45:3). A number of the sages remark on Joseph's display of compassion. Rashi,¹ for instance, says that Joseph cries *"Send everyone away from me!"* because he could not bear having the Egyptians there, witnessing to the humiliation of his brothers when his true identity was revealed. Says Rashi, Joseph calls his brothers to *"Come, draw near to me!"* (45.4) so as to speak to them gently, in Hebrew no less, and to prove his identity by showing that he is circumcized.

A striking aspect of this scene is Joseph's willingness to forgive, even reassuring his brothers that the episode of their mistreatment of him was the work of God who directs all human destiny. *"For it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you"* (45.5). It takes maturity to exhibit such confidence in divine providence. It appears that Joseph's past, filled with tragic events, has shaped him into a man of steadfast confidence. Do you agree?

Doing Torah

Am I growing into a person of steadfast confidence in the ways of God?

Share a thought on the challenges of maintaining hope and faith in the midst of trial and setback.

Continue to discuss this Torah portion, seeking insights into the process of reconciliation.



Faith & Life

My wife and I came home one evening to discover that two of our children had had a major fight. There was a hole in the wall and another in the door. One son said that his brother had gone off 'in a huff.'

I set out in the car to look for him, in a mild panic. Had he caught a bus to the city? Had he been drawn into the wrong peer group? I was praying wildly, stumbling past strangers in the shadows, when I spotted him in a park. "Thank you, Lord," I said in an audible voice.

I sat down next to my son. He was distraught. Never before had he been so angry with his brother. I talked with him gently. I listened to his anger. I stopped and felt his hurt. I held him and told him I loved him very much. He wept. I wept.