

**Canon's Catechism:**  
**Should the Catholic Church dialogue with other world religions?**

The reason why I raise this subject is because one or two people have objected to the appearance in our newsletter of an invitation to join the Muslim community in learning more about Ramadan and fasting in the Islamic tradition, and also join in an Iftar (breaking of fast dinner). The Catholic Church, since Vatican II, has encouraged friendship and dialogue with other world religions, whilst remaining true to its own beliefs. There is nothing which compromises our faith in learning about the faith of another religion, or joining them in the fellowship of a meal. In fact, it is a positive good, promoting peace and harmony among different communities. In the UK the fact that so many different cultures and religions can live side by side is an achievement we should be proud of. It is very unfortunate that in many parts of the world such tolerance is in short supply. The Church encourages us along this path of dialogue and friendship with other world religions. The landmark document is "Nostra Aetate", one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, was approved by the Pope and Bishops of the world in 1965. Here are a few key extracts from this document for us all to consider:

*"In this age of ours, when men are drawing more closely together and bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has with non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them." (Para 1)*

*"The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way the truth and the life (Jn 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciles all things to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19), men find the fulness of their religious life. The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussions and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and their culture." (Para 2)*

Turning to the Islamic faith, Nostra Aetate proceeds by emphasizing what Muslims and Christians share in common:

*"The Church also has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own.*

*Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason, they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting. Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The Sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.” (Para 3)*

Nostra Aetate concludes with a call for increased fraternity between Christians and people of other faiths. It is a duty, the document says, for Christians to treat all other people as brothers and sisters:

*“We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God’s image..... Therefore the Church reproves as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, colour, condition in life or religion. Accordingly, following the footsteps of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, the sacred Council earnestly begs the Christian faithful to “conduct themselves well among the unbelievers” (1 Peter 2:12) and if possible, as far as depends on them, to be at peace with all men (Rom. 12:18) and in that way to be true sons of the Father who is in heaven.” (cf Mt 5:45) (Para 5).*

The document Nostra Aetate, laid the foundations for the Catholic Church’s future dialogue with other world religions. In summary, it is telling us there is nothing wrong in sincere dialogue and friendship with those of other world religions. Indeed, it is a positive good to collaborate with them where possible, whilst remaining true to the Christian faith.

If anything, this need for increased dialogue and understanding between the world religions has become more pressing, not less, since Nostra Aetate was promulgated in 1965. As Pope John Paul II said in his speech to young Muslims in Casablanca, Morocco in August 1985:

*“We Christians and Muslims have many things in common, as believers and as human beings. We live in the same world, marked by many signs of hope, but also signs of anguish. For us Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to His will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings His creatures to their perfection. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims is today more necessary than ever. It flows from our fidelity to God and supposes that we know to recognize God by faith, and to witness to him by word and deed in a world ever more secularized and at times even atheistic.”*