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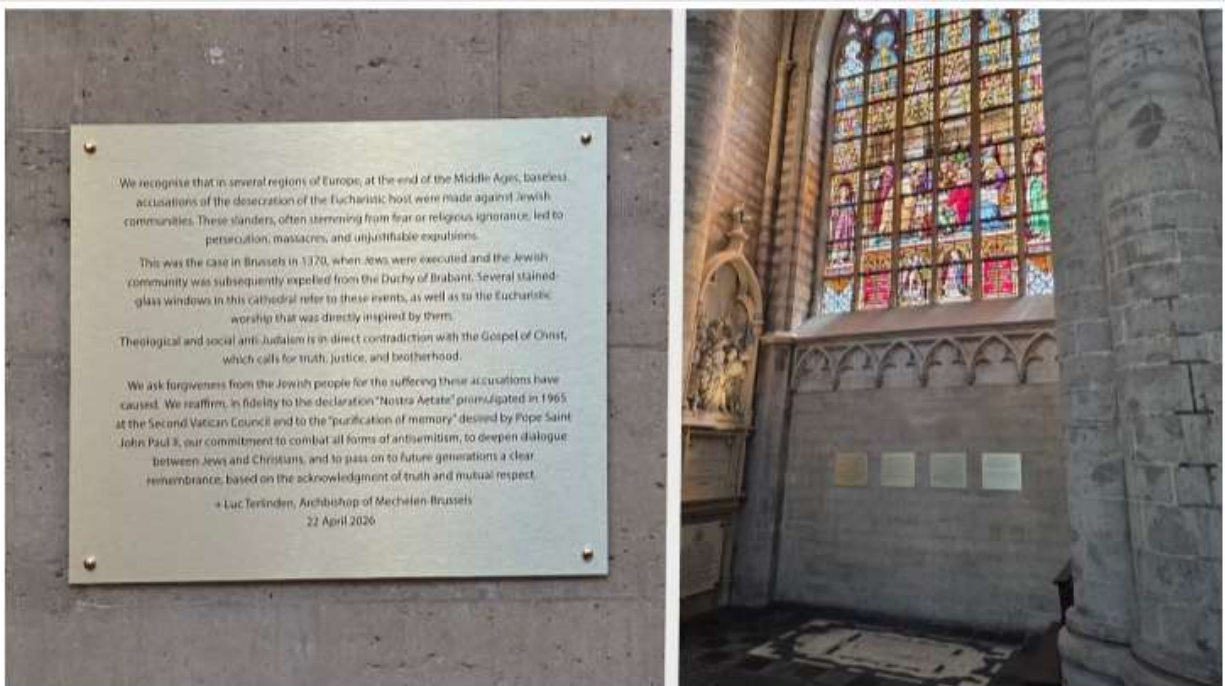
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Brussels cathedral installs plaques apologizing for medieval antisemitic persecution depicted in stained glass

“They must not be erased, because they are part of history, but they must be accompanied by explanation,” the city’s chief rabbi said about the windows.

By [Grace Gilson](#) May 6, 2026



Plaques installed in April 2026 inside the Cathedral of Saints Michael and Gudula in Brussels explain and apologize for the “suffering” caused by the antisemitic accusation depicted in the stained-glass windows. (Courtesy of Flora Cassen)

More than 650 years after Jews in Brussels were executed and expelled following false antisemitic accusations, church officials at the Cathedral of St. Michael and St. Gudula have installed a plaque apologizing for the persecution commemorated in its stained glass windows.

At a ceremony on April 27, Archbishop Luc Terlinden of Mechelen-Brussels and Rabbi Albert Guigui, the chief rabbi of Brussels, unveiled four plaques, written in Dutch, French,

English and Hebrew, providing historical context for the windows and an apology for the antisemitic persecution tied to the events they depict.

The plaques, which Terlinden signed, state that “baseless accusations of the desecration of the Eucharistic host were made against Jewish communities” in medieval Europe and that the accusations “led to persecution, massacres, and unjustifiable expulsions.” The windows show Jews being executed at the stake in response to their alleged attacks on the Eucharist, bread that Catholic doctrine considers a literal representation of Jesus’ body.

“Theological and social anti-Judaism is in direct contradiction with the Gospel of Christ, which calls for truth, justice, and brotherhood,” the plaques say. “We ask forgiveness from the Jewish people for the suffering these accusations have caused.”

The stained glass windows in the cathedral depict the “Brussels Host Desecration,” an antisemitic accusation in 1370 that Jews had desecrated communion wafers, leading to the execution of Jews in Brussels and the expulsion of the city’s Jewish community.

The windows have drawn scrutiny for decades, particularly as the Catholic Church sought to reckon with its history of antisemitism. In 1969, shortly after the landmark *Nostra Aetate* declaration rejecting longstanding anti-Jewish Catholic doctrine, the Archbishop of Brussels [ordered that several paintings be removed](#) and a plaque be mounted to offer context about the remaining depictions.

Several years later, [the European Jewish Congress noted last week](#), Catholic leaders did install a plaque that drew readers’ attention to “the biased nature of the accusations [against the Jews accused of the desecration] and to the legendary presentation of the ‘miracle.’”

But Flora Cassen, the director of the Brandeis Center for Jewish Studies and a scholar of European antisemitism, said the existing plaque was “very ambiguous about the responsibility and what happened” and installed in an easy-to-miss location. The new plaques, she said, contain a clear and “very moving” apology and cannot be missed by anyone who comes to see the windows.

“The significance is enormous of the church finally putting a plaque there that tells the story, that acknowledges the antisemitism behind it, that acknowledges that it was a slander and that it resulted in persecution and in the execution of Jews in Brussels and their expulsion,” Cassen said.



A stained-glass window at the Cathedral of Saints Michael and Gudula in Brussels depicts Jews desecrating the host used during the Eucharist in the Catholic Mass. The accusations led to the execution of some Jews and the expulsion of others in 1370. (Courtesy Flora Kassen)

The new plaques cite *Nostra Aetate* and the Catholic Church's subsequent effort under Pope John Paul II to reckon with historical antisemitism in 2000. They affirm the church's "commitment to combat all forms of antisemitism, to deepen dialogue between Jews and Christians, and to pass on to future generations a clear remembrance, based on the acknowledgement of truth and mutual respect."

While some have called for the historic windows to be removed, Guigui said in a statement that the plaques represented an appropriate way to address relics of historical antisemitism.

"What matters today is how we look at these images," the rabbi said. "They must not be erased, because they are part of history, but they must be accompanied by explanation and moral insight in order to understand the context and avoid repeating past mistakes."