

A Synthesis of Meeting God in Friend and Stranger



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In its course, *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* answers the most burning questions on inter-religious dialogue, and does not shy away from the more complex and confrontational ones. Where does dialogue lead us if the people we seek out as our partners are not willing to take part in it? Can we give an expression to our admiration of other religions' deep spirituality by sharing in their prayers? How do we manage dialogue within our lives, and the structures of our church?



The most important question answered is, perhaps, the question as to the reasons for dialogue – why, as a Church that is convinced that it has found the truth in Jesus Christ, do we need to show such a keen interest in the faith of others? The answer to this takes us to the very core of the document, its clear and balanced middle chapter on the theology of dialogue.

As a Church, we live in and from the dialogue of salvation that God has entered into with his Church from its beginnings. We trust that God leads us, in this dialogue, ever closer to his truth, and makes his will known to us through the

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times. Dialogue is what keeps and furthers God's Church, and it is what our lives as Christians is founded on. With this comes the responsibility to turn outwards with the same openness and love that is shown to us.

Jesus' work, the generosity of which did not stop short of giving his own life, is the best example of this work of love – when we enter into dialogue with others, we continue his mission. This also means that dialogue is not the work of specialists alone – entering into the Church by baptism, each Catholic enters into God's dialogue with his Church, and into the obligation of involving others in a similar dialogue. This is particularly



so as all Catholics are baptised in the name of the Trinitarian God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – a God who in himself is dialogue. We share this faith in the Trinitarian God with the other Christian churches, and contact with other religions can profit greatly by a united Christian initiative that goes beyond denominations.

The ways in which Catholics can enter into dialogue are as manifold and different as the people who make up the Church. It can consist purely of being a good and respectful friend, colleague or neighbour, and someone who is not afraid to share the richness of their own faith. Acting together for the common good and for shared causes is also a very valuable form of dialogue, and one that makes a strong case for religions as a source of cooperation, not conflict.

As we as Catholics make our prayer in the name of our Trinitarian God, expressing the very essence of our faith in every prayer, we cannot expect people of other religions to join in this prayer, and nor can we join in theirs. Our respect for each other, and the desire to mark occasions together, can find a rich expression in praying in each other's presence, and for each

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other, in the words of our own traditions, shaping a dialogue of Religious Experience.

The document lays out a number of practical avenues that Catholics can go down to share deeper in this work of dialogue wherever they are – as participants in the political process, in the parish, in educational work and in inter-religious organisations. Inter-religious dialogue is a chance to vocalise the hope that we have, and to enrich personal spirituality by witnessing the deep faith of others, and the way this faith influences their lives and their work towards the common good. Marriages between people of different religions can be wonderful, real-life examples of this.

The document gratefully acknowledges the important work that is already being done within the Church, and by a wide variety of its members. This work at the grass root levels that is being carried out with admirable enthusiasm and energy is invaluable for spreading the message of openness and dialogue. It is a sign and act of our faith and hope, and all the resources of the Church – structures, people, and buildings – should be put into its service.

All forms of dialogue can also be enriched and underpinned by a dialogue on the theology of the Catholic Church and that of other religions. This can take place between academics and experts, but also between people with a keen interest in their own tradition. *Meeting God in Friend and Stranger* forms a rich resource for those who are interested in learning more about the theological background of inter-religious dialogue in the tradition of the Catholic Church. It quotes extensively from Vatican II documents, Encyclicals and Papal Letters, and leaves the reader with a comprehensive list of texts for further reading.

Dialogue, in any form, won't always be easy, and the document recognises this – often, it will involve overcoming prejudice, in ourselves and others, and it is difficult to enter into dialogue in the awareness that not all our partners will be well disposed to us and our values. After learning from and being inspired by other religions, the challenge still remains to accept the differences that remain as a symbol of the mystery of God, which does, in the same way, always remain just beyond our reach.

This work of dialogue is, today more than ever, necessary and something that cannot be abandoned as long as we hold on to our faith and hope that God is with us, present through us in his Church, and making himself known to us through the ages. In our work with other religions, we can trust in the fact that we are brothers and sisters, creatures of the same God, who has the same wonderful plan of salvation for each and every one of us. This unity between us is stronger than all that divides us, and we are called, each and everyone, to make this message felt.

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Meeting God in Friend and Stranger is published by CTS: www.cts-online.org.uk



ACTS OF WORSHIP

The dialogue of Religious Experience can take the form of being present at, and inviting others to, acts of worship.

When inviting a friend or acquaintance from another religion, it is good to give them an idea of what is going to happen, and to talk through the parts of the Mass in which they can, if they so wish, participate. When visiting places of worships of other religions, an attitude of respect is all that is necessary – by enquiring about any rules and expectations beforehand, and asking any question with the intention of learning from and about the occasion and the faith, the experience can be shaped to be rich and enriching. Holy days can be particular occasions for engagement, and a greeting or a good wish on that day or days can be a lovely gesture. Below is a small selection of festivals and holy days that are coming up as an inspiration – there are, of course, many more which cannot be mentioned here.

Dates for your diary:

On Sunday, 2nd May the Sikh community marked the birthday of the fifth Guru.

On Wednesday, 19th May Jews celebrated Shavuot (The Festival of Weeks), seven full weeks after Passover, celebrating the giving of the Torah.

Saturday, 29th May sees the celebration of the ascension of the founder of the Bahai faith.



Tue 20 July
The date of the Zoroastrian New Year.

Mon 26 July
Buddhists celebrate the anniversary of Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment.



Fri 10 September
Sees Eid-ul-Fitr, with which Muslims mark the end of Ramadan.

PAPAL VISIT TO THE UK

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI will visit England and Scotland on a four day papal visit from 16-19 September 2010.

Where and When Scotland

Pope Benedict will be received at the Palace of Holyroodhouse by Her Majesty The Queen. He will celebrate a public Mass in Glasgow.

London

His Holiness will give a major speech to British civil society at Westminster Hall. He will be present at a prayer vigil. There will be an event focusing on education. Relations between the Christian Churches will be a theme of the visit as will the relations between the major faiths.

The Holy Father will visit the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth Palace. Pope Benedict will pray with other Church leaders at Westminster Abbey.

Midlands

His Holiness will also visit the West Midlands to beatify the nineteenth century theologian and educationalist Cardinal John Henry Newman at a public Mass in Coventry.

The screenshot shows the homepage of thepapalvisit.org.uk. It features the Pope's coat of arms, a navigation menu with links for Home and Media, Get Involved, Login, Contact Us, and Donate. A main heading reads 'POPE BENEDICT XVI IN THE UNITED KINGDOM'. Below this, there is a 'Welcome to thepapalvisit.org.uk' message, a 'Latest News' section with a date of 09/04/2010 10:27 am, and a 'Get Involved' button. A hand cursor is visible over the 'Get Involved' button.

Official website

www.thepapalvisit.org.uk is the official website for Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Great Britain. The Holy Father will visit England and Scotland on a four-day visit from 16-19 September 2010.

Sign up for regular updates on www.thepapalvisit.org.uk. For all the background information on the 2010 visit and to follow every aspect of the Pope's visit from when he touches down in Scotland to when he returns to Rome. Make sure that you are part of this historic visit online. Please keep Pope Benedict XVI and the Bishops of England, Wales and Scotland in your prayers as they prepare for the first State Visit by a Pope to the UK.

