

ARCHBISHOP NICHOLS: DIALOGUE A TASK FOR ALL

Bishops of England and Wales Publish Teaching Document

LONDON, APRIL 28, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The task of interreligious dialogue isn't only a task for leaders of the world's religions, but rather one that corresponds to every member of the Church, says the archbishop of Westminster.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols, who is also the president of the episcopal conference of England and Wales, noted this in the introduction to a teaching document of the conference on interreligious dialogue.

In his introduction to the 102-page text titled "Meeting God in Friend and Stranger: Fostering Mutual Respect and Understanding Between the Religions," the archbishop stated that there are those who believe that religious beliefs "are divisive and, at worst, belittling."

"Yet the quest for God," he noted, "is rooted in the spirit of every human being and brings with it the quest for holiness, goodness, compassion, forgiveness, perseverance, humility and truth."

"Of course, the history of this quest is marked with failure and sin," the archbishop continued. "But so are all of our strivings."

"The religious quest, properly understood, tackles these failings head on, proclaiming the need for every person to turn away from corruption, selfishness and the misuse of power in the effort to know the mystery of God and the mystery of our common humanity."

The Catholic faith, Archbishop Nichols continued, "instructs us and guides us not only in the unique pathway to God through Jesus Christ, but also in the manner in which we are to learn about and cooperate with people of other faiths."

That work of learning about and cooperating with other faiths, he added, is "a task and a duty which falls to us all."

Good neighbors

The document is composed of six chapters, the first of which answers the question "What is Interreligious Dialogue?"

"Interreligious dialogue, then, as the Catholic Church understands it, includes simply living as good neighbors with those of other religions, or working together in matters of common concern, such as in issues of justice, peace, the integrity of creation and so forth," the text states. "It includes a willingness, according to circumstances, to try to understand better the religion of one's neighbors, and to experience something of their religious life and culture. In other words, dialogue is above all a frame of mind, an attitude."

The second chapter is titled "The Changing Face of Britain" and it addresses the rising visibility of non-Christian religions in the United Kingdom: "In many parts of the country mosques, gurdwaras and temples are a familiar sight, alongside churches and synagogues, all witnessing to the religious, cultural and ethnic identity of those who worship there."

Additionally, it notes that even the Catholic Church itself has become a "multi-racial community, having a rich diversity of its own. Nowadays the Catholic Church in England and Wales is a reflection of this, embracing the cultural diversity that is so much a feature of Catholicism across the world.

"Our parishes often include Catholics from Africa, India, Vietnam, South America, the Caribbean and the Philippines, not to mention those who came from Poland and Italy in the 1940s, and the immigrants from Eastern Europe over the past few years."

The bishops note that the Church in the United Kingdom "has been greatly enriched by this diversity, showing us how the one Gospel can be 'inculturated' in many different ways."

"Catholics, of all people," the text adds, "should respect diversity, not only the diversity among Catholics and Christians in general, but the diversity within the general population of other ethnic groups and religions."

Balance

The third chapter, and the longest of the text, is titled "Dialogue in the Teaching of the Catholic Church."

"In all its teaching," the text states, "the Catholic Church keeps a careful balance between insisting that God truly wills the eternal salvation of all people, and insisting with equal force that Christ is the one and only means and mediator of this salvation. The Church also keeps a balance between recognizing what is true and holy in other religions, and yet insisting on the importance of an explicit faith in Christ and membership of the Church through baptism.

"Thus the promotion of dialogue has not diminished the necessity of proclaiming the Gospel and calling those who do not believe in Christ to conversion while fully respecting the liberty of each person."

The text, however, underlines "the fundamental truth that judgment about people's eternal salvation belongs to God, and to God alone."

The last three chapters consider prayer and worship, interreligious marriage, and what the faithful can do at the local level to promote dialogue.

In a final reflection, the bishops urge the faithful to read the text "as a call to renew our commitment to Christ and the Gospel, to pray for a deeper faith in the living presence of God, and in the confidence of that faith and with Christ within us, to go out in humble and persevering dialogue to our brothers and sisters in the great religions of the world."

"To turn away from even the attempt to dialogue is to despair of the power of God and of his risen Son to advance his own Kingdom of peace and love," the text adds. "It is to forget that the work of dialogue, as with all forms of evangelization, is not our work

at all, but his. We are merely his 'earthen vessels,' whose limitations show that the extraordinary power belongs to God, and does not come from us."

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On the Net:

Meeting God in Friend and Stranger: http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/content/download/7157/49373/file/Meeting_God_in_Friend_and_Stranger.pdf

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