

**Speech by Rt Rev Paul Hendricks,
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Reception to celebrate faith communities and inter-faith dialogue

**Embassy of Slovakia, London W8
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I'm very happy to be here this evening, to celebrate the role of faith in communities and the importance of inter-religious dialogue.

From one point of view, the need for dialogue is obvious. Whatever our faith tradition, we don't live in a bubble on our own. We live in the midst of a lively and varied community, enriched by the contributions of people from all over the world. Daily life is a constant dialogue, where we learn from each other — and, it's true, at times this means our assumptions and attitudes are challenged, which can do us a lot of good! Dialogue with people of other religions has enriched my own faith, because it stimulates me to ask new questions and to re-examine my attitudes. As a result, my faith is not weakened, but strengthened.

Pope Francis is a great inspiration to us all, with regard to dialogue with people of other faiths. Last February, he met with the Grand Imam of Egypt's Al-Azhar mosque and university, to sign a commitment to fraternity between religions, races and nations.

About the same time, in Britain, concern was expressed about the results of a survey, showing that only about a quarter of our people think Islam is 'generally compatible with the values of society in my country.'

This is a disturbing figure for anyone committed to inter-religious dialogue. But my question would be, what does 'compatible' mean?

If it means it's possible for a faithful Muslim to obey the law and to live peacefully with his neighbours — then I say 'yes'. If it means that all the prevailing values of our society are in harmony with Islam, then I'd say 'no'. But then I'd say exactly the same about Christianity.

For both religions there are similar tensions, not only in the obvious areas of life-issues and human sexuality, but also with regard to individualism, consumerism and materialism.

I don't think this is because of anything especially anti-religious about modern society. I see these tensions as part of the conflict within each of us, between the goodness we aspire to, and the temptations of our fallen human nature.

And just as religion challenges us to renew and to purify our intentions, so religion itself needs to be continually renewed and purified. At the meeting I mentioned earlier, Pope Francis said:

'True religious piety consists in loving God with all one's heart and one's neighbour as oneself. Religious behaviour, therefore, needs continually to be purified from the recurrent temptation to judge others as enemies and adversaries. Each belief system is called to overcome the divide between friends and enemies, in order to take up the perspective of heaven, which embraces persons without privilege or discrimination.'

I would say that this can't happen in a vacuum, only in respectful dialogue between our friends and neighbours of other religions.

I'm very happy to note the role of the Constantinian Order, in supporting this evening's reception. This is very appropriate, considering their long-standing commitment to promoting inter-religious relations in this country and internationally. The fact that their Prior for Britain is Cardinal Vincent Nichols, is a clear sign of the importance of their work.

I'd also like to congratulate Anthony Bailey on his dedicated service of the Order, as their delegate for Britain and Ireland for the past twenty years. Congratulations to you and thank you for all that you do for the Order, for the Church and for the cause of inter-religious relations.