



## VISITE DU PAPE BENOÎT XVI EN FRANCE DU 12 AU 15 SEPTEMBRE 2008



Dossier de presse  
Annexes

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*This press information will be soon completed with other files*

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Annexe A

## The programme of Pope Benedict XVI's apostolic visit to Paris

### How to join in ?

**There is no pre requisite from participants or groups in order to join in (no reservation or registration).**

The programme may still be modified: please check our update on [www.papeaparis.org](http://www.papeaparis.org)

### Informations

For any information concerning the visit: [www.papeaparis.org](http://www.papeaparis.org)

Telephone line : **01 45 49 67 12** – email: [contact@papeaparis.org](mailto:contact@papeaparis.org)

### **FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2008**

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#### **Pope Benedict XVI's first apostolic visit to France.**

For the first time as a Pope, Benedict XVI will come to France on an apostolic visit. It will be his tenth apostolic visit abroad. Cardinal Ratzinger knows France well; his last visit took place in June 2004, for the sixtieth anniversary of the D-Day.

On his arrival, in the middle of the day, Pope Benedict is to meet the President of the French Republic and other French officials.

He will also meet with the leaders of other Christian denominations as well as the representatives of the Muslim and Jewish communities.

From 3 p.m. on Friday, September 12, the public will have access to the quay close to Notre Dame Cathedral on the Left Bank : Quai de la Tournelle, Quai Montebello, Quai Saint-Michel.

- The metro and RER will be operating as usual.

- Large monitors screens will be placed all a long the quays allowing everyone to follow the afternoon events (meetings and prayers)

#### **The Pope will address the world of culture.**

At 5:30 p.m., the Pope will go to the Bernardins college ([www.collegedesbernardins.fr](http://www.collegedesbernardins.fr) in the fifth arrondissement of Paris) to address representatives of the world of culture.



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Seven and a half centuries after its foundation, the newly restored Bernardins College is to be used as a place of research and reflection for the Church and society, on man and his future.

Live broadcast on the monitors near Notre Dame Cathedral on the Left Bank quays.

### **Ride through the streets of Paris in the papamobile.**

Between 6:30 and 7:00 p.m. the Pope will be driven to Notre-Dame Cathedral in the papamobile.

Free access to the papamobile's itinerary on the Left Bank quays. Live broadcast on the monitor screens.

### **Prayer at Notre-Dame Cathedral**

Between 7:00 and 8:00 p.m. the Holy Father will celebrate vespers with priests, seminarians, religious and nuns in the Cathedral.

The faithful can also join in: the service will be broadcast live on the large monitor screens outside the Cathedral and along the papamobile's itinerary.

### **Greetings and message to young people.**

At 8:15 p.m., after vespers, the Pope will go outside Notre Dame Cathedral to address young people and open the session of evening prayers at the Cathedral and several other churches.

Benedict XVI's speech to young people will be broadcast live on the large monitor screens outside the Cathedral and on the quays.

### **Prayer evening at Notre Dame Cathedral with young people.**

At 8:00 p.m. picnic and music in front of Notre-Dame Cathedral.

At 21hrs15, evening of prayer with the young people at Notre-Dame cathedral, the theme will be that for the World Youth Day in Sidney (July 2008) "But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit will comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1, 8)



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Free access. Live broadcast on the large monitor screens outside the cathedral.

### **A prayer evening in Paris**

Several churches in Paris will hold prayers throughout in the evening with different communities, movements and prayer groups.

Free access. The complete programme will be available on time in a special booklet or on [www.papeaparis.org](http://www.papeaparis.org)

### **A candle procession at midnight from Notre Dame Cathedral to the Invalides Esplanade.**

The meeting point will be at midnight in front of Notre Dame; the candle procession will follow the statue of Our Lady to the Invalides Esplanade.

- Free access. Meeting point at midnight in front of Notre Dame Cathedral.
- It will possible to join the procession at any time anywhere on the journey.
- Candles will be distributed

## **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2008**

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### **Courtesy visit to the *Institut de France***

At 9:10 a.m.: The Holy Father will be at the *Institut de France* (he is a Foreign Member of their *Académie des Sciences Morales et Politique* (Academy of Moral and Political Sciences)).

### **High Mass with the Pope. The Invalides**

The esplanade of the Invalides has been chosen in order to allow everyone to take part in the High Mass celebrated by the Holy Father on Saturday, September 13 at 10 o'clock.

At 8:00 a.m.: morning prayers organised by religious communities.

At 9:45 a.m.: arrival of the Pope, who will be driven all across the Esplanade in the papamobile.

At 10:00 a.m.: celebration of a High Mass by the Pope.



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- Free Access
- For technical reasons the Esplanade will only be partly accessible during the night and will be opened progressively in the morning.
- The metro and RER will be operating as usual. The Invalides, Varenne, and La Tour Maubourg metro stations will be closed. Participants must use the closest stations.
- Plan to arrive at 8:30 a.m. at the latest, after which time it will no longer be possible to get access to the Esplanade : main walks will be closed
- Cars will not be allowed to drive through the streets close to the Invalides. Coaches with special permission will be allowed to park in the streets leading to the Esplanade. Special permission can be obtained from [autocars@papeaparis.org](mailto:autocars@papeaparis.org). It is advisable for coaches to arrive before 7:30 a.m.
- Choral groups wishing to join the 1,000-strong choir organised for the occasion may contact [chorale@papeaparis.org](mailto:chorale@papeaparis.org).

- For security reasons luggage and large bags, knives, glass bottles, gas containers, large flags, banners, and boards not be allowed on the Esplanade.
- It will be possible for groups to stay on the Esplanade after the celebration.

### **FROM SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 to MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15**

After his visit to Paris the Pope will go on pilgrimage to Lourdes for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apparitions.

The Paris diocese is offering the possibility of a pilgrimage from Paris to Lourdes with the Pope, departure by TGV from Paris on Saturday, September 13, after the High Mass on the Invalides Esplanade. Return on Monday, September 15 in the evening. Information and registration at [parislourdes@papeaparis.org](mailto:parislourdes@papeaparis.org) or by phone: +33(0)1 45 49 67 12



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## **The Programme of Pope Benedict XVI'S apostolic visit to Lourdes**

Lourdes will be an "open town". It will be easily accessible either by plane, train, coach or car.

For groups it will be possible to find place in a reserved area for the Mass on Sunday, September 14. For further information, please contact the person in charge of pilgrimages in your diocese.

Contact e-mails/telephone numbers for information:

For groups [2008@lourdes-france.com](mailto:2008@lourdes-france.com)

For individuals +33 (0) 5 62 42 20 08

Access is possible by car. Vehicles will find parking lots in Lourdes or in the vicinity.

The premises where the celebrations are to take place will be easily accessible.

For those wishing to help during the Holy Father's visit, please contact:

[benevole-pape@lourdes-france.com](mailto:benevole-pape@lourdes-france.com)

Priests wishing to concelebrate during the Holy Father's visit should contact : [pretre-pape@lourdes-france.com](mailto:pretre-pape@lourdes-france.com)

### **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2008**

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- 6:30 p.m.: arrival of the Holy Father by helicopter at the Antoine Béguère Stadium. The Pope will then go to the *Sacré Coeur* church and the "cachot" (dungeon): the first two stages of the Jubilee Way. He will then take *the Boulevard de la Grotte* to reach the Sanctuaries.

In the Sanctuaries the pilgrims will be able to follow the Holy Father's progress on large monitor screens.

- At 7:30 p.m. the Pope will enter the Sanctuaries at Notre Dame of Lourdes through Saint Michael's door and reach the cave of the Apparitions (3<sup>rd</sup> stage of the Jubilee Way)

- At 8:30 p.m., beginning of the Marian torchlight procession on the Esplanade of the Rosary Basilica.

- At 9:30 p.m., the Holy Father will join the procession on the terrace outside the Rosary Basilica, and address the pilgrims from there.



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### **SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2008**

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9:30 a.m.: arrival of the Holy Father at the Prairie (Meadow)

10:00 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.: Mass of the Glorious Cross in the *Prairie* celebrated particularly for the young people.

5:00 p.m.: Eucharistic procession in the *Prairie*.

5:15 p.m.: Meeting between the Pope and the French Bishops in the hemicycle of St. Bernadette's church.

6:30 p.m.: the Holy Father will join the Eucharistic procession and pray with the pilgrims before addressing and blessing them.

### **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2008**

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8:45 a.m.: visit to the Oratory of the Hospital (4<sup>th</sup> stage of the Jubilee Way) and moment of contemplation and prayer in the place where Bernadette had her first communion. This stage will be broadcast live on the large monitor screens in the Sanctuaries.

9:15 a.m.: arrival of the Holy Father at the Rosary Basilica.

9:30 a.m.: Mass on the Esplanade of the Rosary Basilica to celebrate our Lady of Sorrows, particularly for the sick and hospital and medical staff. In the course of the celebration, the Holy Father will personally administer the Sacrament for the Sick.

12:30 p.m.: farewell ceremony at the Tarbes –Lourdes- Pyrenees airport.



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Annexe B

## **Benedict XVI's teaching about the family**

*"I have the issue of marriage and the family particularly at heart" (1)*

This is what Benedict XVI declared in an address to German bishops. It underlines the importance of the family in his teaching.

### **The family, a pillar for the building of man and society**

For Benedict XVI, the family is first of all the primordial cell from which the full development of a human person proceeds. *"The family is the privileged environment where every person learns to receive and to give love. That is why the Church constantly wishes to demonstrate her pastoral concern for this reality, which so decisive for the human person" (2) « The family (...) is the place where men and women are allowed to be born with dignity, and to grow and develop in an integral manner" (3).*

Within the family, children accept a heritage, and also bear witness to its fecundity. *"Parents have the right and the inalienable duty to transmit this heritage to their children: to help them find their own identity, to initiate them to the life of society, to foster the responsible exercise of their moral freedom and their ability to love on the basis of their having been loved and, above all, to enable them to encounter God. Children experience human growth and maturity insofar as they trustingly accept this heritage and training, which they gradually make their own. They are thus enabled to make a personal synthesis between what has been passed on and what is new, a synthesis that every individual and generation is called to make" (4).*

The family is thus one of the pillars of society. For this reason, when promoting and defending the family, the Church works for the benefit of the entire social body. *"We are well aware that the family founded on marriage is the natural environment in which to bear and raise children and thereby guarantee the future of all of humanity. However, we also know that marriage is going through a deep crisis and must face numerous challenges today. It is consequently necessary to defend, help, safeguard and value it in its unrepeatable uniqueness" (5).*

### **God, the origin and end of the family**

Beyond this strongly structured anthropological vision, Benedict XVI also looks at the family in theological terms: *"At the beginning of every human life, together with every human fatherhood and motherhood, God the Creator is present. This is why husband and wife must welcome the child born from them not only as their own son or daughter but also a child of God, who loves him or her for his or her*





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*own sake and calls him or her to divine filiation” (6).*

In Jesus, God wished to live in a human family. *“In the Gospel we do not find discourses on the family but an event which is worth more than any words (...). In this way (Jesus) consecrated the family as the first and ordinary means of his encounter with humanity” (7).*

### **The family, at the heart of any true politics**

This is why, after the Convention organized for the World Day of the Family, Benedict XVI insisted on *“the central and irreplaceable role the family plays in our society”*. He asserted that *« as the fundamental cell of society, the family must also be at the centre of political action”*.

The Pope emphasizes the importance of the family as an institution which must face numerous and complex challenges today. To confront family crises, sometimes also due to situations of precariousness, Benedict XVI believes that it is more and more urgent *“to unite... strengths in order to support families in all possible ways: social, economic, legal and spiritual” (7)*

*“Consequently, echoing my predecessor, ‘I wish to call on all Christians to collaborate cordially and courageously with all people of good will who are serving the family according to their responsibilities’, so that by joining forces in a legitimate plurality of initiatives they will contribute to the promotion of the authentic good of the family in contemporary society” (8).*

The Catholic Church travels along with families during their entire lifetime, by offering sacraments: matrimony, baptism, reconciliation, the Eucharist, confirmation, the anointing of the sick. She supports them in the education of their children: catechism, Catholic schools, leisure centres, Boy- and Girl-Scouts organizations. Many movements linked with the Catholic Church provide space for thinking and action to people of all ages.

In France, about one third of school-age children take part in catechism. The French Catholic-school system taught 2.3 million students in the academic year 2007-2008.

(1) Address to the second group of German bishops on their "ad limina" visit, 16 November, 2008.

(2) Address to the Fifth World Meeting of Families in Valencia (Spain), City of Arts and Sciences, 9 July, 2006.

(3) Homily during Mass in the same place on the same occasion, 9 July, 2006.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Angelus, 4 February, 2007.

(6) Homily delivered in Valencia, July 9, 2006.

(7) Angelus, 31 December 2006.(8) Homily delivered in Valencia, July 9, 2006. The Pope quotes from "Familiaris Consortio", an encyclical by John Paul II.



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Annexe C

### **Benedict XVI: Faith and Reason**

The Catholic faith holds human reason in high esteem. Like his predecessor John Paul II (Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 1998), Benedict XVI has often expressed himself about the profound relationship between faith and reason.

The Holy Father affirms the great value of human reason, which takes part in the search for Truth, especially in the sciences. At the University of Regensburg in September 2006, the Pope said: “The faith of the Church has always insisted that between God and us, between the eternal Creator Spirit and our created reason,” even if there are dissimilarities, “there exists a real analogy”. This means that practical reason has a value in itself and that it also can and should be linked to the life of faith.

Joseph Ratzinger recalled this at the Sorbonne University of Paris in 1999: when the first Christians presented their religion to the pagans, he pointed out, they situated it not within the framework of the religions of the time (myths, official cult and rituals), but in the continuity of philosophy. Why? Because the pagan religions were not able to extract themselves from the sphere of the human, while philosophy presented itself as the necessary search for the truth, surpassing that which is purely human. The God who is revealed, arising from the unique experience of the people of Israel, makes himself known as an always higher truth, always requiring further searching. The Christian faith, which follows Christ, enters into this quest. In the second century AD, St Justin did not hesitate to speak of Christianity as a real philosophy.

#### **The rationality of faith**

Benoit XVI gives great importance to the Hellenistic heritage. In the excitement of the happy rediscovery of the Bible and more precisely, of the Semitic world in which the Bible was composed, it has become fashionable to oppose Jewish revelation and Greek philosophy. There are those who criticize the first Christian councils, because they used the vocabulary of Greek philosophy to explain the faith and the divinity of Christ. Christian faith is sometimes seen as needing to be liberated from these Greek philosophical terms, considered as anachronistic and foreign to the Revelation. There have been attempts to return to the earliest sources and to announce the Gospel more efficiently, notably in those countries whose culture differs from the Greco-Latin culture, such as India or China, by separating the Greek heritage of the first centuries of the church, in order to return to the “purity” of the biblical texts.

In reality this is an error concerning the Revelation itself. Because if it was made within a precise context (the people of Israel), it was transmitted in a world marked by Hellenistic thinking. A synthesis was achieved within the Bible itself, notably in the Wisdom literature (Psalms, etc ; ) and in the translation of the biblical texts into Greek by 70 Jewish scholars at Alexandria (what is called the Septuagint version of the Bible). This rendition of the Bible made during the third and first century before Christ is more



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than a simple translation: it is “an important advance of the history of the Revelation”. In translating ideas (such as *torah* by *law*, or *tsedaqah* by *justice*), the Septuagint expresses the Biblical statements in the language of philosophy and opens the way to a possible debate between Biblical reasoning and Hellenistic reasoning. John writes in his Gospel that “at the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* is God”. “The Word of God” is understood as *Logos*, that which means “word” can also mean “reason”.

Benedict XVI’s remarks concerning the de-hellenization of Christianity are not an academic prank. It reminds us that there is rationality in faith. Ignoring the contribution of philosophy to Christianity will lead to no longer understanding the link between faith and the search for Truth.

### **The autonomy of faith and of reason**

Benedict XVI is equally attentive to the autonomy of reason and of faith. He said this in the speech that he was to give at the Sapienza University of Rome, a university specifically founded by a pope. The former university professor knows as well as anyone that one should not confuse the two. It is not a question of injecting a little piety into science in order to save reason or to do good theology.

### **Concordism or fundamentalism damage both faith and reason.**

The Holy Father insists that the true grandeur of reason is the search for truth, including the truth concerning religion. Seeking the truth requires dialogue and work done in a climate of respect and freedom (Vatican II Declaration on Religious Freedom). It is there that human reason appears with all its magnitude and potentialities. Not only do Christians have a stake in this but also everyone, who, in an ever more secular society, risks no longer to confront the essential metaphysical questions. It is the mission of the Church to “safeguard the reasonableness of the truth” and “to invite reason to set out ever anew in search of what is true and good, in search of God”. Without this mission the Church loses sight of her mission and distorts herself.



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Annexe D

## Benedict XVI and Europe

### Promoting unity and peace in Europe

When he chose to be called Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger wished his pontificate to be inscribed in a tradition bearing the stamp of St Benedict, the founder of monasticism in the West and also one of the patron saints of Europe.

As the Pope noted during a general audience held in April, 2008, *“By proclaiming St Benedict the Patron of Europe on 24 October, 1964, Paul VI intended to recognize the marvelous work the Saint achieved with his Rule for the formation of the civilization and culture of Europe. Having recently emerged from a century that was deeply wounded by two World Wars and the collapse of the great ideologies, now revealed as tragic utopias, Europe today is in search of its own identity. Of course, in order to create new and lasting unity, political, economic and juridical instruments are important, but it is also necessary to awaken an ethical and spiritual renewal.”*

Choosing this papal name also draws attention to the great figure of Pope Benedict XV –“the Pope for peace” - thus revealing the Holy Father's concern about peace.

The short pontificate of Benedict XV (1914-1922) coincided with the First World War, the Armenian genocide, and the Soviet revolution. He firmly and repeatedly condemned the Great War. In the appeal for peace he sent to warring governments in 1917, he described it in turn as *“a monstrous sight”, “a frightful scourge”, “the suicide of civilian Europe”, “a tragedy of human madness”*. He finally termed it *“a useless massacre”*. But this earned him the hostility of the ruling classes in the countries at war. His intervention was received quite differently by grassroots Catholics and socialists. The latter felt betrayed by their leaders who had adopted the war logic of their governments.

*Pacem Dei Munus*, the first encyclical devoted to peace ever issued by a pope, was published in 1920. A tireless seeker for peaceful solutions, Benedict XV believed in the wisdom of diplomatic mediation and especially reconciliation between enemies. Pope Benedict XVI is eminently concerned with peace, and constantly encourages the continuation of European integration, as he did in Vienna, in September 2007, when speaking to the diplomatic corps: *“The process of unification remains a most significant achievement, which has brought about a period of unusual peace to this continent, formerly consumed by constant conflicts and tragic fratricidal wars”*.



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### **Benedict XVI calls upon Europe to respect the dignity of the human being.**

Yet, as he showed in March 2007, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, Benedict XVI looks with severity at certain present tendencies of European policies. *“A community built without respect for the true dignity of the human being, disregarding the fact that every person is created in the image of God, ends up doing no good to anyone. For this reason it seems ever more important that Europe be on its guard against the pragmatic attitude, widespread today, which systematically justifies compromise on essential human values, as if it were the inevitable acceptance of a lesser evil”.*

The Pope also calls for the opening of Europe to other countries in the world, especially in Africa: *“With gratitude we can observe that the countries of Europe and the European Union are among those making the greatest contribution to international development, but they also need to make their political importance felt, for example with regard to the urgent challenges presented in Africa”.*

When saying this during his trip to Austria (September 2007), Benedict XVI also emphasized the importance he attaches to dialogue between faith and reason, linked to the Christian roots of Europe: *“Another part of the European heritage is a tradition of thought, which considers as essential a substantial correspondence between faith, truth and reason. Here the issue is clearly whether or not reason stands at the beginning and foundation of all things. The issue is whether reality originates from chance and necessity, and thus whether reason is merely a mere by-product of irrationality and whether, in an ocean of irrationality, it too, in the end, is meaningless; or instead whether the underlying conviction of the Christian faith remains true: In principio erat Verbum - in the beginning was the Word; at the origin of everything is the creative reason of God, who decided to make himself known to us human beings”.*

On the same day, the Pope continued as follows: *“In this context, permit me to quote Jürgen Habermas, a philosopher who does not share the Christian faith. He has stated: ‘For the normative self-understanding of the modern period, Christianity has been more than a mere catalyst. The egalitarian universalism which gave rise to the ideas of freedom and social coexistence is a direct inheritance from the Jewish notion of justice and of the Christian ethics of love. Substantially unchanged, this heritage has always been critically reappropriated and interpreted anew. To this day there is no alternative to it’”.*



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### Relations with Judaism

As a theologian, Cardinal Ratzinger had always been interested in Judaism. It is therefore natural that Pope Benedict should have invested himself to carry on the work of his predecessor John Paul II concerning relations with Judaism.

The day after his election, April 22, 2005, Pope Benedict XVI addressed a message to the Chief Rabi of Rome, in which he affirmed his firm intention "to carry on the dialogue to reinforce the collaboration with the sons and daughters of the Jewish people." In June 2005, the Pope had his first meeting with a delegation of the "International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations."

Pope Benedict reaffirmed his commitment during his visit to the Cologne synagogue in August 2005 and in his October 26, 2005 letter addressed to Cardinal Walter Kasper on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of "Nostra Aetate" (Declaration on the Relations of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council). He stated that "Jewish-Christian dialogue must continue to enrich and deepen the bonds of friendship which have developed," and he expressed his hope that "as we look to the future, (...) both in theological dialogue and in everyday contacts and collaboration, Christians and Jews will offer an ever more compelling shared testimony to the One God and his commandments, the sanctity of life, the promotion of human dignity, the rights of the family and the need to build a world of justice, reconciliation and peace for the future generations."

#### **In words and in deeds Pope Benedict has shown how much he cares for the Jewish community**

In September 2005 Benedict XVI received the two Chief Rabbis of Israel, Shlomo Moshe Amar and Yona Metzger and later, in January, the Chief Rabi of Rome, Riccardo Di Segni. When receiving the latter he affirmed with force: "The Catholic Church is close to you and is your friend. Yes, we love you and we cannot but love you, because of the Fathers: through them you are very dear and beloved brothers to us".

Shortly after Pope Benedict's election, Ariel Sharon, Prime Minister of Israel at the time, wrote to invite him to visit Israel. In November 2005, the President of Israel, Moshe Katsav, had made an official state visit to the Vatican. Shimon Peres, the current President of the State of Israel, visited the Pope at Castel Gandolfo in September 2007. He renewed the invitation for the Pope to visit Israel. In December 2006, the current Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert was received by the Holy Father.

During his foreign visits Pope Benedict has included numerous gestures of respect toward the Jewish Community and has met with representatives of the Jewish community whenever possible.

One should note his important address at the Synagogue of Cologne, where he said: "I wish to encourage sincere and trustful dialogue between Jews and Christians, for only in this way will it be possible to arrive at a shared interpretation of disputed historical questions, and, above all, to



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make progress towards a theological evaluation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.”

On May 28, 2006, the Holy Father visited the concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Austria, September 2007, he visited the Judenplatz of Vienna, the ancient center of Jewish life and currently a memorial to the 65,000 Austrian Jews who were killed during the Holocaust. Each time the pope has denounced and condemned any and all forms of anti-Semitism.

During his recent visit to the United States the Pope addressed a message to Jews celebrating the festival of Passover and visited synagogues in Washington, D.C. and New York City.

### **The Jewish community in France**

The Jewish community has been present in France for over 2,000 years. It now counts approximately 700,000 persons. France has the third largest Jewish population in the world after Israel and the United States. The Paris metropolitan area has a Jewish population of about 350,000. Other large Jewish communities exist in Alsace, in the South West (notably Bordeaux and Toulouse), metropolitan Lyons and the Provence-Alps-Cote d'Azur region.

Their community organizations are very lively and diverse. The majority of European Jewish organizations have their headquarters in Paris.

The 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Israelite Consistory established by Napoleon (the constitutionally recognized representative body of the Jewish community) was recently celebrated. A new Grand Rabbin (Chief Rabbi) of France was elected June 22, 2008: Rabbi Gilles Bernheim.

Relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community in France have greatly developed since the Second Vatican Council. This progress was built upon the efforts of many persons such as Jules Isaac, Edmond Fleg, Jacques Maritain, and Fr. Bonsirven. The AJCF (Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France) and the SIDIC (Service d'Information et de Documentation Juifs-Chrétiens), founded by the Sisters, of Zion have played a decisive role in the progress of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue.

In April 1973 the Episcopal Committee on Jewish Relations published a very important document: “The attitude of Christians in regard to Judaism,” whose influence has been evident outside of France. An important step forward was made with the “Declaration of Repentance” signed by a large number of Catholic bishops on September 30, 1997 at Drancy. The personality and role of Cardinal Lustiger (a Jewish convert to Catholicism) concerning the relations between the Jewish community and Catholics is recognized by all.

The then Grand Rabbin of Paris, David Messas, and the Archbishop of Paris, André Vingt-Trois, published in March 2007 a joint declaration on the care of the sick approaching the end of their lives. In November of the same year a week of Judeo-Christian Dialogue was launched on the initiative of the AJCF.