



POPE BENEDICT XVI

Pope Benedict XVI's Speech to The Queen

Palace of Holyrood House, Edinburgh, Thursday, 16 September 2010

Your Majesty,

Thank you for your gracious invitation to make an official visit to the United Kingdom and for your warm words of greeting on behalf of the British people. In thanking Your Majesty, allow me to extend my own greetings to all the people of the United Kingdom and to hold out a hand of friendship to each one.

It is a great pleasure for me to start my journey by saluting the members of the Royal Family, thanking in particular His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh for his kind welcome to me at Edinburgh Airport. I express my gratitude to Your Majesty's present and previous Governments and to all those who worked with them to make this occasion possible, including Lord Patten and former Secretary of State Murphy. I would also like to acknowledge with deep appreciation the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Holy See, which has contributed greatly to strengthening the friendly relations existing between the Holy See and the United Kingdom.

As I begin my visit to the United Kingdom in Scotland's historic capital city, I greet in a special way First Minister Salmond and the representatives of the Scottish Parliament. Just like the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assemblies, may the Scottish Parliament grow to be an expression of the fine traditions and distinct culture of the Scots and strive to serve their best interests in a spirit of solidarity and concern for the common good.

The name of Holyroodhouse, Your Majesty's official residence in Scotland, recalls the "Holy Cross" and points to the deep Christian roots that are still present in every layer of British life. The monarchs of England and Scotland have been Christians from very early times and include outstanding saints like Edward the Confessor and Margaret of Scotland. As you know, many of them consciously exercised their sovereign duty in the light of the Gospel, and in this way shaped the nation for good at the deepest level. As a result, the Christian message has been an integral part of the language, thought and culture of the peoples of these islands for more than a thousand years. Your forefathers' respect for truth and justice, for mercy and charity come to you from a faith that remains a mighty force for good in your kingdom, to the great benefit of Christians and non-Christians alike.

We find many examples of this force for good throughout Britain's long history. Even in comparatively recent times, due to figures like William Wilberforce and David Livingstone, Britain intervened directly to stop the international slave trade. Inspired by faith, women like Florence Nightingale served the poor and the sick and set new standards in healthcare that were subsequently copied everywhere. John Henry Newman, whose beatification I will celebrate shortly, was one of many British Christians of his age whose goodness, eloquence and action were a credit to their countrymen and women. These, and many people like them, were inspired by a deep faith born and nurtured in these islands.

Even in our own lifetime, we can recall how Britain and her leaders stood against a Nazi tyranny that wished to eradicate God from society and denied our common humanity to many, especially the Jews, who were thought unfit to live. I also recall the regime's attitude to Christian pastors and religious who spoke the truth in love, opposed the Nazis and paid for that opposition with their lives. As we reflect on the sobering lessons of the atheist extremism of the twentieth century, let us never forget how the exclusion of God, religion and virtue from public life leads ultimately to a truncated vision of man and of society and thus to a "reductive vision of the person and his destiny" (Caritas in Veritate, 29).

Sixty-five years ago, Britain played an essential role in forging the post-war international consensus which favoured the establishment of the United Nations and ushered in a hitherto unknown period of peace and prosperity in Europe. In more recent years, the international community has followed closely events in Northern Ireland which have led to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement and the devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Your Majesty's Government and the Government of Ireland, together with the political, religious and civil leaders of Northern Ireland, have helped give birth to a peaceful resolution of the conflict there. I encourage everyone involved to continue to walk courageously together on the path marked out for them towards a just and lasting peace.

Looking abroad, the United Kingdom remains a key figure politically and economically on the international stage. Your Government and people are the shapers of ideas that still have an impact far beyond the British Isles. This places upon them a particular duty to act wisely for the common good. Similarly, because their opinions reach such a wide audience, the British media have a graver responsibility than most and a greater opportunity to promote the peace of nations, the integral development of peoples and the spread of authentic human rights. May all Britons continue to live by the values of honesty, respect and fair-mindedness that have won them the esteem and admiration of many.

Today, the United Kingdom strives to be a modern and multicultural society. In this challenging enterprise, may it always maintain its respect for those traditional values and cultural expressions that more aggressive forms of secularism no longer value or even tolerate. Let it not obscure the Christian foundation that underpins its freedoms; and may that patrimony, which has always served the nation well, constantly inform the example your Government and people set before the two billion members of the Commonwealth and the great family of English-speaking nations throughout the world.

May God bless Your Majesty and all the people of your realm. Thank you.