



POPE BENEDICT XVI

Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks' Address to Pope Benedict XVI

Waldegrave Drawing Room, St Mary's University College, Twickenham, Friday 17 September 2010

We welcome you, leader of a great faith, to this gathering of many faiths, in a land where once battles were fought in the name of faith, and where now we share friendship across faiths.

That is a climate change worth celebrating. And we recognise the immense role the Vatican played and continues to play in bringing it about. It was *Nostra Aetate*, 45 years ago, that brought about the single greatest transformation in interfaith relations in recent history, and we recognise your visit here today as a new chapter in that story, and a vital one.

The secularization of Europe that began in the seventeenth century did not happen because people lost faith in God. Newton and Descartes, heroes of the Enlightenment, believed in God very much indeed. What led to secularization was that people lost faith in the ability of people of faith to live peaceably together. And we must never go down that road again. We remember the fine words of John Henry Cardinal Newman, "We should ever conduct ourselves towards our enemy as if he were one day to be our friend," as well as your own words, in *Caritas in Veritate*, that "the development of peoples depends... on a recognition that the human race is a single family, working together in true communion, not simply a group of subjects who happen to live side by side."

We celebrate both our commonalities and differences, because if we had nothing in common we could not communicate, and if we had everything in common, we would have nothing to say. You have spoken of the Catholic Church as a creative minority. And perhaps that is what we should all aspire to be, creative minorities, inspiring one another, and bringing our different gifts to the common good.

Britain has been so enriched by its minorities, by every group represented here today and the intricate harmonies of our several voices. And one of our commonalities is that we surely all believe that faith has a major role in strengthening civil society. In the face of a deeply individualistic culture, we offer community. Against consumerism, we talk about the things that have value but not a price. Against cynicism we dare to admire and respect. In the face of fragmenting families, we believe in consecrating relationships. We believe in marriage as a commitment, parenthood as a responsibility, and the poetry of everyday life when it is etched, in homes and schools, with the charisma of holiness and grace.

In our communities we value people not for what they earn or what they buy or how they vote but for what they are, every one of them a fragment of the Divine presence. We hold life holy. And each of us is lifted by the knowledge that we are part of something greater than all of us, that created us in forgiveness and love, and asks us to create in forgiveness and love. Each of us in our own way is a guardian of values that are in danger of being lost, in our short-attention-span, hyperactive, information-saturated, wisdom-starved age. And though our faiths are profoundly different, yet we recognize in one another the presence of faith itself, that habit of the heart that listens to the music beneath the noise, and knows that God is the point at which soul touches soul and is enlarged by the presence of otherness.

You have honoured us with your presence, and we honour you. May you continue to lead with wisdom and generosity of spirit, and may all our efforts combine to become a blessing to humanity and to God.