



POPE BENEDICT XVI

Archbishop of Canterbury's Speech to Pope Benedict

Lambeth Palace, 17 September 2010

Your Holiness, brother bishops, brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is a particular pleasure that on this historic occasion we are able to come together as bishops of the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in this country to greet you, Your Holiness, during a visit which we all hope will be of significance both to the Church of Christ and to British society. Your consistent and penetrating analysis of the state of European society in general has been a major contribution to public debate on the relations between Church and culture, and we gratefully acknowledge our debt in this respect.

Our task as bishops is to preach the Gospel and shepherd the flock of Christ; and this includes the responsibility not only to feed but also to protect it from harm. Today, this involves a readiness to respond to the various trends in our cultural environment that seek to present Christian faith as both an obstacle to human freedom and a scandal to human intellect. We need to be clear that the Gospel of the new creation in Jesus Christ is the door through which we enter into true liberty and true understanding: we are made free to be human as God intends us to be human; we are given the illumination that helps us see one another and all created things in the light of divine love and intelligence. As you said in your Inaugural Mass in 2005, recalling your predecessor's first words as pope, Christ takes away nothing "that pertains to human freedom or dignity or to the building of a just society... If we let Christ into our lives we lose absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. Only in his friendship is the great potential of human existence revealed." [Inaugural Homily, Rome, 24 April 2005]

Our presence together as British bishops here today is a sign of the way in which, in this country, we see our task as one and indivisible. The International Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission has set before us all the vital importance of our common calling as bishops to be agents of mission. Our fervent prayer is that this visit will give us fresh energy and vision for working together in this context in the name of what a great Roman Catholic thinker of the last century called 'true humanism' – a passionate commitment to the dignity of all human beings, from the beginning to the end of life, and to a resistance to every tyranny that threatens to stifle or deny the place of the transcendent in human affairs.

We do not as churches seek political power or control, or the dominance of Christian faith in the public sphere; but the opportunity to testify, to argue, sometimes to protest, sometimes to affirm – to play our part in the public debates of our societies. And we shall, of course, be effective not when we have mustered enough political leverage to get our way but when we have persuaded our neighbours that the life of faith is a life well lived and joyfully lived.

In other words, we shall be effective defenders or proclaimers of our faith when we can show what a holy life looks like, a life in which the joy of God is transparently present. And this means that our ministry together as bishops across the still-surviving boundaries of our confessions is not only a search for how we best act

together in the public arena; it is a quest together for holiness and transparency to God, a search for ways in which we may help each other to grow in the life of the Holy Spirit. As you have said, Your Holiness, “a joint fundamental testimony of faith ought to be given before a world which is torn by doubts and shaken by fears.” [‘Luther and the Unity of the Churches’, 1983]

In 1845, when John Henry Newman finally decided that he must follow his conscience and seek his future in serving God in communion with the See of Rome, one of his most intimate Anglican friends and allies, the priest Edward Bouverie Pusey, whose memory the Church of England marked in its liturgical calendar yesterday, wrote a moving meditation on this “parting of friends” in which he said of the separation between Anglicans and Roman Catholics: “it is what is unholy on both sides that keeps us apart”.

That should not surprise us: holiness is at its simplest fellowship with Christ; and when that fellowship with Christ is brought to maturity, so is our fellowship with one another. As bishops, we are servants of the unity of Christ’s people, Christ’s one Body. And, meeting as we do as bishops of separated church communities, we must all feel that each of our own ministries is made less by the fact of our dividedness, a very real but imperfect communion. Perhaps we shall not quickly overcome the remaining obstacles to full, restored communion; but no obstacles stand in the way of our seeking, as a matter of joyful obedience to the Lord, more ways in which to build up one another in holiness by prayer and public celebration together, by closer friendship, and by growing together both in the challenging work of service for all whom Christ loves, and mission to all God has made.

May this historic visit be for all of us a special time of grace and of growth in our shared calling, as you, Your Holiness, bring us the word of the Gospel afresh.

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