



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY
AND PRIMATE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION,
HIS GRACE ROWAN DOUGLAS WILLIAMS***

Saturday, 4 October 2003

*Most Reverend and Right Honourable
Rowan Williams
Archbishop of Canterbury*

It is a great pleasure to welcome you here on this your first visit to the Apostolic See as Archbishop of Canterbury. You continue a tradition which began just before the Second Vatican Council, with the visit of Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher, and you are the fourth Archbishop of Canterbury whom I have had the pleasure of welcoming during my Pontificate. I also vividly recall my own visit to Canterbury in 1982, and the moving experience of praying at the tomb of Saint Thomas Becket with Archbishop Robert Runcie.

The four centuries following the sad division between us, during which time there was little or no contact between our predecessors, have given way to a pattern of grace-filled meetings between the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. These encounters have sought to renew the links between the See of Canterbury and the Apostolic See which have their origins in the sending by Pope Gregory the Great of Saint Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, to the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms in the late sixth century. In our own day, these meetings have also given expression to our anticipation of the full communion which the Holy Spirit desires for us and asks of us.

As we give thanks for the progress that has already been made we must also recognize that new and serious difficulties have arisen on the path to unity. These difficulties are not all of a merely disciplinary nature; some extend to essential matters of faith and morals. In light of this, we must

reaffirm our obligation to listen attentively and honestly to the voice of Christ as it comes to us through the Gospel and the Church's Apostolic Tradition. Faced with the increasing secularism of today's world, the Church must ensure that the deposit of faith is proclaimed in its integrity and preserved from erroneous and misguided interpretations.

When our theological dialogue began, our predecessors Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey could not have known the exact route or duration of the path to full communion, but they knew that it would require patience and perseverance, and that it would come only as a gift of the Holy Spirit. The dialogue they initiated was to be "founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions"; it was to be coupled with the fostering of collaboration which would "lead to a greater understanding and a deeper charity"; and the hope was expressed that with progress towards unity there might be "a strengthening of peace in the world, the peace that only He can grant Who gives 'the peace that passeth all understanding'" (*Common Declaration*, 1966).

We must persevere in building on the work already achieved by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) and on the initiatives of the recently established joint Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM). The world needs the witness of our unity, rooted in our common love for and obedience to Christ and his Gospel. It is fidelity to Christ which compels us to continue to search for full visible unity and to find appropriate ways of engaging, whenever possible, in common witness and mission.

I take heart that you have wished to pay a visit to me so early in your ministry as Archbishop of Canterbury. We share a desire to deepen our communion. I pray for a renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon you and your loved ones, upon those who have travelled here with you, and upon all the members of the Anglican Communion. May God keep you safe, watch over you always, and guide you in the exercise of your lofty responsibilities. On this feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, an apostle of peace and reconciliation, let us pray together that the Lord will make us instruments of His peace. Where there is injury, may we bring pardon; where there is hatred may we sow love; where there is despair, may our humble search for unity bring hope.