



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY  
HIS GRACE ROWAN WILLIAMS**

*Thursday, 23 November 2006*

*Your Grace,  
Dear friends,*

Grace and peace to you in the Lord Jesus Christ! Your visit here today brings to mind the important custom established by our predecessors in recent decades. It also reminds us of the much longer history of relations between the See of Rome and the See of Canterbury which began when Pope Gregory the Great sent Saint Augustine to the land of the Anglo-Saxons over 1,400 years ago. I am happy today to welcome you and the distinguished delegation accompanying you. This is not our first meeting. Indeed, I was grateful for your presence, and that of other representatives of the Anglican Communion, at the [funeral of Pope John Paul II](#), and again at the inauguration of my pontificate a year and a half ago.

Your visit to the Holy See coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the visit of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey, to Pope Paul VI. It was a visit filled with great promise, as the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church took steps towards initiating a dialogue about the questions to be addressed in the search for full visible unity.

There is much in our relations over the past forty years for which we must give thanks. The work of the theological dialogue commission has been a source of encouragement as matters of doctrine which have separated us in the past have been addressed. The friendship and good relations which exist in many places between Anglicans and Catholics have helped to create a new context in which our shared witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been nourished and advanced. The visits of Archbishops of Canterbury to the Holy See have served to strengthen those relations and have played an important role in addressing the obstacles which keep us apart. This tradition

helped give rise to a constructive meeting of Anglican and Catholic bishops in Mississauga, Canada, in May 2000, when it was agreed to form a joint commission of bishops to discern appropriate ways to express in ecclesial life the progress which has already been made. For all of this, we give thanks to God.

In the present context, however, and especially in the secularized Western world, there are many negative influences and pressures which affect Christians and Christian communities. Over the last three years you have spoken openly about the strains and difficulties besetting the Anglican Communion and consequently about the uncertainty of the future of the Communion itself. Recent developments, especially concerning the ordained ministry and certain moral teachings, have affected not only internal relations within the Anglican Communion but also relations between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church. We believe that these matters, which are presently under discussion within the Anglican Communion, are of vital importance to the preaching of the Gospel in its integrity, and that your current discussions will shape the future of our relations. It is to be hoped that the work of the theological dialogue, which had registered no small degree of agreement on these and other important theological matters, will continue to be taken seriously in your discernment. In these deliberations we accompany you with heartfelt prayer. It is our fervent hope that the Anglican Communion will remain grounded in the Gospels and the Apostolic Tradition which form our common patrimony and are the basis of our common aspiration to work for full visible unity.

The world needs our witness and the strength which comes from an undivided proclamation of the Gospel. The immense sufferings of the human family and the forms of injustice that adversely affect the lives of so many people constitute an urgent call for our shared witness and service. Precisely for this reason, and even amidst present difficulties, it is important that we continue our theological dialogue. I hope that your visit will assist in finding constructive ways forward in the current circumstances.

May the Lord continue to bless you and your family, and may he strengthen you in your ministry to the Anglican Communion!

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**ADDRESS OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY**  
**TO THE HOLY FATHER**

*Your Holiness,*

It gives me great pleasure to be able to greet you in this city, which was sanctified in the very early

days of the Christian era by the ministry of the Apostles Peter and Paul, and from which so many of your predecessors have borne noble witness to the transforming Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Early in my ministry as Archbishop of Canterbury, I was able to visit your much loved and venerated predecessor, Pope John Paul II, and to bring to him the greetings of the worldwide Anglican family of churches of some eighty million Christians. Pope John Paul had inspired many throughout the world by his dedication to Christ, and, as you know, had won a special place in the hearts of many beyond the Roman Catholic Church by the compassion and steadfastness revealed in his ministry to all.

As we meet on this occasion, we are also recalling and celebrating the visit forty years ago of my predecessor Archbishop Michael Ramsey to Pope Paul VI, when this encounter between the leaders of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches initiated a process of reconciliation and friendship which has continued to this day. The ring that I wear today is the episcopal ring which Pope Paul gave to Archbishop Michael, this cross the gift from Pope John Paul II, symbolic of our shared commitment to work together for the *full* visible unity of the Christian family.

It is in that same fraternal spirit that I make this visit now, since the journey of friendship that they began is one that I believe that we should continue together. I have been heartened by the way in which from the very beginning of your ministry as Bishop of Rome, you have stressed the importance of ecumenism in your own ministry. If the Good News of Jesus Christ is to be *fully* proclaimed to a needy world, then the reconciliation of all Christians in the truth and love of God is a vital element for our witness.

I say this, conscious that the path to unity is not an easy one, and that disputes about how we apply the Gospel to the challenges thrown up by modern society can often obscure or even threaten the achievements of dialogue, common witness and service. In the modern world, no part of the Christian family acts without profound impact on our ecumenical partners; only a firm foundation of friendship in Christ will enable us to be honest in speaking to one another about those difficulties, and discerning a way forward which seeks to be wholly faithful to the charge laid upon us as disciples of Christ. I come here today, therefore, to celebrate the ongoing partnership between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, but also ready to hear and to understand the concerns which you will wish to share with me.

However, there is a task which is laid upon us both as pastors of the Christian family: to be advocates of reconciliation, justice and compassion in this world - to be ambassadors for Christ - and I am confident that an honest exchange of our concerns will not be allowed to eclipse what we can affirm and proclaim together - the hope of salvation and healing found in the Grace and Love of God revealed in Christ.

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