



Considering the Ecumenical Impact on Evangelisation.

Archbishop Stephen took part in the conference as part of his official visit to the Anglican Centre in Rome and the Holy See. He was joined by Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Pro-Prefect for the Section of Evangelization of Dicastery for Evangelization. The address follows in full

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this conversation today. I met and heard Cardinal Tagle speaking at the Lambeth Conference, which is the 10 yearly gathering of Anglican bishops last year. And as I've already said to him, he was the highlight of the show. It was a wonderfully powerful and moving address and Archbishop Ian was sitting there, and I think that's when he dreamt up this idea that the two of us meet here in Rome, and speak together about some of the most important issues facing our world and our church, which is how we share the gospel with those who do not yet know Christ. We live in a world where thousands and thousands of people in the countries where we serve, grow up with little or no knowledge of Jesus Christ, little or no contact with church.

Two things strike me. First of all, that we have got habituated to the idea that our churches, particularly the West, in the developing world, will decline and go on declining. We accept that as the way things are. But equally scandalous, we accept our disunity. We've become so used to it, that we think it is the normal state of affairs.

So I want to begin my little talk, and I hope it'll lead into conversation. First of all, a little story that I told the other evening, I'll tell it again, it's not a funny story, so please don't laugh. But it's about a man who dies and goes to heaven. When he gets to heaven, he's very surprised to see that there are two doors. One door says 'heaven'. The other door says 'interesting discussion about the concept of heaven'. And everyone is queuing up at the second door. And I believe one of the biggest mistakes that we have made, is that we've allowed the pursuit of unity, the sharing of the gospel, to become things that we talk about, we write papers about, we have conferences about, we have conversations about, rather than to see this as something we must do.

And this particularly came home to me this week, I had the great honour of an audience with Pope Francis. I wasn't really sure what to expect, I thought it might be in and out, a quick handshake, and that was it. No, we sat down, we spoke together, we prayed together. And what Pope Francis emphasised is walking together, working together, praying together.

I think I want to say to you, that I believe ecumenism is something we do, that evangelization is something we do. And I also want to say this, in St. John's gospel, we are told that on the cross, not one bone of his body was broken. And yet, we have succeeded in breaking just about every bone of his body, the church. And worse than that, we have accepted it as the normal state of affairs, and at our peril do we underestimate the impact this has on our evangelization. I believe that people growing up in our world today, look at us Christians who claim to be the body of Christ, who have been blessed and charged with responsibility for sharing a message of peace and reconciliation. They look at us and say, well, if they can't even agree amongst themselves then why should we listen to them? How can it be that their story has something to say to our story?

As we know, Jesus prayed on the night before he died, that his church may be one. And we often hear those words and pray those words, but we forget that he said it so that the world may believe. Therefore the title of this conversation this morning, the ecumenical impact on evangelization can be read in two ways.

First of all, it is a cry from the heart of God, that we make the prayerful and active pursuit of unity, by doing things together, by working together, walking together, praying together, a new priority for the church in order that the world may believe. But secondly, I think he is saying something about how we will find this unity. For if we do, as we do, acknowledge one another's baptism aren't we already most of the way there? We all tend to look at it in a negative way. We are most of the way there if we acknowledge our baptism.

So it's my experience and the experience of many other bishops, priests and ministers of the gospel in all denominations, that it's when the Church of Jesus Christ in all its different forms and shapes and sizes, when we reach out together in mission, in service of the world, the proclamation of the gospel, our unity is strengthened and revealed. Moreover, in fact, more importantly, the world we serve, the world for which Christ died, is so very thirsty for this compelling demonstration that it is possible for those who are profoundly divided - let's not underestimate the differences between us, they are there. But when those who are still divided on some things, who in the past that even tried to eliminate each other, when we start living together in respectful and life giving unity, furthermore, when people see us walking together and working together and praying together, they turn to Christ. This is itself a proclamation of the heart of the gospel, which is of barriers broken down. Our pursuing unity, and doing ecumenism and evangelization together can be the best proclamation of the gospel, and we are put together and healed as the body of Christ. Of course, this will never be enough. Of course, we need to allow the bishops and the theologians to catch up. But the more that we do this, the more that we see this at the very local level in our parishes and communities, then no Bishop, no theologian, no Archbishop, will fail to notice that this is a demonstration of healing and a witness to hope.

When I became the 98th Archbishop of York, inheriting the See of Paulinus, one of the band of missionaries sent by Pope Gregory with Augustine, to evangelise England. The very first thing I did after becoming Archbishop was I went to the shrine of Margaret Clitheroe, one of the English Reformation martyrs in York. And I was met by Bishop Terry Drainey, the Bishop of Middlesbrough. We went into the shrine and prayed together, inside. I look back over my three years in office and I still think it may be the most useful, and wisest thing I have done, and the very best use of my time. And what we need in our church is those decisions at the local level, to say that, despite our differences, and because of the great, great need of the world, to see what reconciliation looks like, in a world of confusion, division, hurt, that we, sisters and brothers because of our baptism, need to work together, walk together, pray together.

Let me finish with two things that have really struck me this week. When I visited the Holy Father on Monday, I wasn't expecting him to pray with us. He did. And we said together what we in England called the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. Later that day, I visited St. Peter's in Rome for the first time. And I went down into the excavations beneath the building, and came to that bit, where you see the bones of Saint Peter. And the tour guide said, Would you like to offer a prayer? We did. We said the Our Father. In the afternoon I went to St Paul's outside the walls and was met by Cardinal Harvey. And we prayed at the shrine of Paul and we said together, the Our Father. And what I've been thinking about, that I can't avoid, is the word our. Because as soon as you say that prayer and say that word, you are committing yourself to each other. You are saying, that person with whom I share this prayer, not my father, not your father it's our father. By saying that prayer, we commit ourselves to be sisters and brothers in Christ and therefore giving a different and more life giving witness to the world and seeking unity with each other.

Now at the opening of the General Synod of the Church of England in 2015, the then preacher to the Papal household, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa

spoke. And he finished by saying these words. He was speaking about the pursuit of unity, and he said, "in those parts of the world where Christians are killed and churches torched, it is not because they are Catholic or Anglican or Pentecostal, but because they are Christians. In our persecutors eyes we are already one" he said. "Let us be one also in our own eyes.

The conference was livestreamed on the Anglican Centre's [Facebook](#) page

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