

## **Common Declaration of the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams and Pope Benedict XVI**

**The Vatican, 23 November 2006**

Forty years ago, our predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Michael Ramsey, met together in this city sanctified by the ministry and the blood of the Apostles Peter and Paul. They began a new journey of reconciliation based on the Gospels and the ancient common traditions. Centuries of estrangement between Anglicans and Catholics were replaced by a new desire for partnership and co-operation, as the real but incomplete communion we share was rediscovered and affirmed. Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Ramsey undertook at that time to establish a dialogue in which matters which had been divisive in the past might be addressed from a fresh perspective with truth and love.

Since that meeting, the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion have entered into a process of fruitful dialogue, which has been marked by the discovery of significant elements of shared faith and a desire to give expression, through joint prayer, witness and service, to that which we hold in common. Over thirty-five years, the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has produced a number of important documents which seek to articulate the faith we share. In the ten years since the most recent Common Declaration was signed by the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the second phase of ARCIC has completed its mandate, with the publication of the documents *The Gift of Authority* (1999) and *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005). We are grateful to the theologians who have prayed and worked together in the preparation of these texts, which await further study and reflection.

True ecumenism goes beyond theological dialogue; it touches our spiritual lives and our common witness. As our dialogue has developed, many Catholics and Anglicans have found in each other a love for Christ which invites us into practical co-operation and service. This fellowship in the service of Christ, experienced by many of our communities around the world, adds a further impetus to our relationship. The International Anglican - Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission (IARCCUM) has been engaged in an exploration of the appropriate ways in which our shared mission to proclaim new life in Christ to the world can be advanced and nurtured. Their report, which sets out both a summary of the central conclusions of ARCIC and makes proposals for growing together in mission and witness, has recently been completed and submitted for review to the Anglican Communion Office and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and we express our gratitude for their work.

In this fraternal visit, we celebrate the good which has come from these four decades of dialogue. We are grateful to God for the gifts of grace which have accompanied them. At the same time, our long journey together makes it necessary to acknowledge publicly the challenge represented by new developments which, besides being divisive for Anglicans, present serious obstacles to our ecumenical progress. It is a matter of urgency, therefore, that in renewing our commitment to pursue the path towards full

visible communion in the truth and love of Christ, we also commit ourselves in our continuing dialogue to address the important issues involved in the emerging ecclesiological and ethical factors making that journey more difficult and arduous.

As Christian leaders facing the challenges of the new millennium, we affirm again our public commitment to the revelation of divine life uniquely set forth by God in the divinity and humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that it is through Christ and the means of salvation found in him that healing and reconciliation are offered to us and to the world.

There are many areas of witness and service in which we can stand together, and which indeed call for closer co-operation between us: the pursuit of peace in the Holy Land and in other parts of the world marred by conflict and the threat of terrorism; promoting respect for life from conception until natural death; protecting the sanctity of marriage and the well-being of children in the context of healthy family life; outreach to the poor, oppressed and the most vulnerable, especially those who are persecuted for their faith; addressing the negative effects of materialism; and care for creation and for our environment. We also commit ourselves to inter-religious dialogue through which we can jointly reach out to our non-Christian brothers and sisters.

Mindful of our forty years of dialogue, and of the witness of the holy men and women common to our traditions, including Mary the Theotókos, Saints Peter and Paul, Benedict, Gregory the Great, and Augustine of Canterbury, we pledge ourselves to more fervent prayer and a more dedicated endeavour to welcome and live by that truth into which the Spirit of the Lord wishes to lead his disciples (cf. Jn 16:13). Confident of the apostolic hope "that he who has begun this good work in you will bring it to completion"(cf. Phil 1:6), we believe that if we can together be God's instruments in calling all Christians to a deeper obedience to our Lord, we will also draw closer to each other, finding in his will the fullness of unity and common life to which he invites us.