

COMMENTS ABOUT THE PAPAL VISIT TO ENGLAND FROM THE VATICAN

ROME, AUG. 18, 2010.- A Vatican spokesman says Benedict XVI's trip to the United Kingdom next month will be an opportunity to effectively present a secularized society with the positive contribution and beauty of the Christian faith and the Catholic Church.

Fr. Lombardi said that the Pope's first-day meeting with the queen is "awaited with great intensity and emotion," as is the Scotland leg of the trip.

"I would like to remind, moreover, that the day the Pope will be in Scotland is the feast of St. Ninian, who is the patron, the evangelizer of Scotland," Father Lombardi noted. "Hence it is a very important day for the Scots."

Then there will be "the Pope's great address in Westminster Hall, the meeting with society, with the world of culture, with all the most active and authoritative components of English society," he continued. "This will certainly be a moment watched with great attention."

Unity-seekers

Father Lombardi added that the ecumenical dimension of the trip should not be discounted. That element includes a meeting between the Pope and the leader of the Anglican Communion, the archbishop of Canterbury.

"The ecumenical celebration certainly has great significance," Father Lombardi contended. "We also know that it is a delicate moment for Anglicanism, because of the internal debates. And it is a delicate moment also for relations with the Catholic Church, because the internal debates are reflected also in the relationship between the Anglicans and the Catholics."

Newman connection

Father Lombardi classified the closing vigil in Hyde Park and the beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman as the "spiritual heart of this visit."

He mentioned the bond that unites the Holy Father to Cardinal Newman, a poet and Anglican pastor, subsequently received in the Catholic Church and made a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII. This bond, explained the Vatican spokesman, is visible in the "profound synthesis between faith and reason" and "in living Christian witness in today's world, in the modern world, giving all the reasons of the Christian faith for those who ask for them, giving reason for our hope in today's world."

State visit

In reference to the novelty of this visit, compared to that of Pope John Paul II 30 years ago, Father Lombardi stressed that much has changed, particularly elements such as "the approach of the visit itself, which has the aspect of a state visit with an official invitation from the queen and the government, whereas that of John Paul II was more specifically pastoral."

"I would say that what is expected, what can be desired, truly hoped for from this visit is the fact of making it understood, of presenting the service of the Christian faith and the service of the Catholic Church for a very developed but also a very secularized society, such as that of the United Kingdom," he said. "A reality, where perhaps many persons wonder about the value of Christian witness and Catholic witness in society."

"Hence, to make it understood that this is a gift for society, a richness that is offered with its service of spiritual inspiration but also of commitment in the educational field, in the field of health, of charity is something very important."

"We hope that this trip will also be a manifestation of the beauty, of the positive meaning of the Holy Father's service in society, much more so in times in which we also have had moments of controversy."

Archbishop Peter Smith (Southwark) thinks the long tradition in the UK of "freedom of speech" will stand the Pope in good stead and help him win over many who are opposed or indifferent.