

# ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

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## COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS CARDINAL WINNING'S ADDRESS TO THE COUNCIL OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN EDINBURGH

I am delighted to have been asked to speak to you this evening in Edinburgh. I hope I can say that I feel quite at home in this company; it's not the first time that I have been asked to speak to a meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews. Some years ago I was invited to address your West of Scotland Branch on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate*, the landmark document of the Second Vatican Council which re-examined and redefined the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people. I am a member of the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity - commission for Jewish-Catholic Relations.

The following year I had the honour to be asked to address the Annual General Meeting of the Council of Christians and Jews in London. On that occasion I noted the approach of the year 2000, for Christians the Year of Jubilee as we celebrate the 2000th Anniversary of Christ's Birth and I suggested that we should take to heart the message of Pope John Paul in his Encyclical Letter proclaiming the Jubilee, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, that we could take the opportunity provided by this special moment in history to engage in dialogue and to seek forgiveness for past wrongs and misunderstandings which have divided the Jewish and Christian communities. The Jewish people does not celebrate this Jubilee as Christians do, yet we are indebted to them for the concept of a Jubilee Year as a Year of the Lord's favour, a tradition described in the Books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy as the Pope noted in his Encyclical Letter.

It was also his fervent wish in this Jubilee Year to go on pilgrimage to the sacred places associated with the birth of both our faiths; in particular to Mt. Sinai where Moses received the Law from God and to Jerusalem, the city holy to both our faiths and central to our religious history and traditions. We share so much: we celebrate Abraham as our father in faith, we share a common heritage of Scripture and spirituality, we acknowledge one God who is Father of all and calls us to inherit a common destiny. Our paths have diverged over many centuries but there is still so much we can look upon as our common inheritance; surely we can give thanks for that and respect one another's fidelity to our different traditions in a mature manner.

Among the most important things that we share, I believe, is a **moral** outlook on life. By that I mean that we share the same belief that our life is a gift from God: our minds, our bodies, our gifts and talents are given to us by God. He endows us with our being and he invites us to live our lives in accordance with his will. For people of faith that means that our lives can never be totally self-sufficient, never self-centred, never selfish. What we are and what we do, we are and do in relation to the God who made us and who keeps us in being and who calls us to share his life for all eternity.

Seen through the eyes of faith a moral life is a life lived in relationship with God. And in his wisdom God has chosen to direct our lives in many and marvellous ways. In both our religious traditions we have a rich heritage of divine revelation as God has spoken to us through his agents. For the Jewish people the Torah is the supreme expression of God's guidance for his people, a divinely ordained Law given to them to order their relationships with God and one another. Christians, too, revere the Law of Moses and accept as their own the great prophets of Israel who proclaimed God's message in good times and bad. Over many centuries the great teachers of Judaism have continued to develop laws and traditions in accordance with God's revelation which seek to guide the Jewish people on a spiritual and moral path.

For Christians, of course, Christ is the supreme Teacher, a uniquely qualified Teacher who reveals the Father's will and shows us the path to true living, moral living, in communion with God and one another. While Jews do not accept Christ's central role in God's saving plan, still together we agree that we receive from God, in our different traditions, a teaching and an enlightenment **which comes from above**, a moral code which is not man-made or invented by us: it is something which is revealed to us by the Father who has made us his children.

I have been very much aware of this moral framework which informs the lives of people of faith in these last few weeks when, you may have been aware, there has been some controversy over Clause 28. In case you have been abroad or very preoccupied elsewhere, I will simply remind you that that is the Clause in our legislation which bans the active promotion of homosexuality as a lifestyle in our schools. The heat of the debate has perhaps obscured the very important and very serious fact that there are two very different approaches to morality current in our country today.

One is the morality of the people of faith which I have already described. It is a morality rooted in God's revelation and God's teaching. It is a morality which is found throughout every aspect of creation, of the natural order, the way our bodies are designed and the uses to which they are put. For people of faith it is simply not acceptable to abuse the bodies which God has given us and put them to uses for which they were not meant. That is only a small part of the God-given morality which we proclaim but it is an important part: it says a great deal about how we live in relation to our Creator and to one another.

Set against that understanding of morality is another very different one. It does not acknowledge our indebtedness to God and divine teaching. It tends to be detached from any of the great religious traditions of our world. It is a morality, I believe, which may be well-intentioned but is not firmly rooted in any secure principles, it does not have a sound appreciation of our place in the created scheme of things and it tends to avoid at all costs the difficult questions of moral living. It simply declares that you may do whatever you like so long as you don't harm anyone else. With that sole limitation, almost anything goes: any lifestyle, any sexual practice, anything you feel like doing. Morality is what suits you best at the moment: what appears good to you today! And anyone who attempts to suggest that one lifestyle or one sexual practice is unacceptable is condemned as intolerant or bigoted.

When two such divergent approaches to moral living are current in our society major problems arise in many fields. How can legislators frame laws which are just and accepted by all when they impinge on matters of life, death and sexual morality? For many people of faith the law permitting abortion is a sin crying to heaven, the outrageous denial of life to the unborn innocent. For others "The woman's right to choose" is paramount. Here is a classic example of those two different moralities at work: for people of faith no woman has the right to choose to HI the unborn child. There is a higher order of morality, a divine injunction against taking life, which far surpasses anyone's right to choose abortion.

Euthanasia generates the same passion and illustrates again different versions of morality at work within our society. If life is God's gift it is also God's right to take it, it is not ours to dispose of at will. A morality which rejects God is a morality which also sometimes tries to make gods of human beings, arrogating the power to take even life itself. The debate over euthanasia shows up again how very differently people can view their moral responsibilities and exercise their moral judgement.

And right through our society today I would maintain that we can see different moral forces at work and sometimes, I am afraid to say, choices being made which are not moral, not well informed, not soundly based on any true principles of moral conduct. In the whole field of personal relationships, family life, sexual practices there are too many people behaving in dangerous and unprincipled ways. In a climate where "anything goes", in a society which in large part has abandoned its traditional religious, moral and spiritual foundations there are too many people who have no roots in their lives, no secure spiritual home, no soundly based moral framework. And it is my firm belief that we need those things. We are not capable of inventing an entire moral structure for ourselves, and we shouldn't even try. Of course we have to address the urgent and topical moral issues of every age and every society, but we have to address them by basing our judgements on sound moral principles and solid moral teaching: the principles and teaching that come from God.

In recent weeks I have been impressed by the courageous and forthright statements of moral principles which have been made in our country by religious leaders of all traditions, Jewish Christian and Muslim. Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks made a notable contribution to the debate over Clause 28 and restated sound Jewish moral teaching. His is an example of an authentic moral voice, speaking with the authority of a religious tradition going back to the Patriarchs and to Moses the Lawgiver. And there is a word which is not currently used much today and is certainly not fashionable: authority.

It is the concept of **authority** which lies at the heart of what I am saying tonight. Authentic moral teaching is teaching **which has authority**. Authentic moral teaching is coherent, it is based on sound principles and it is not afraid to address the difficult moral issues of the day. More important still it is not afraid to give difficult answers to questions if those answers are the true and authentic ones. These are great claims for religious moral teaching and I would be very arrogant if I claimed them for myself or for any other religious leader. But I don't make these claims for myself, I claim them on behalf of the God who has revealed himself to us in human history, in human time, in human experience and has shown us how to live in a moral way by living in communion with him. There's another word, not unlike authority. It is autonomy.

I would also stress that when I speak of the **authority** of the moral teaching given to us by God I do not mean that that teaching is **authoritarian**. The two are sometimes confused and it is also true that there have been and continue to be occasions when religious leaders have been harsh and intolerant in their application of moral principles. But that is not the moral teaching which comes from God. That teaching has authority, most certainly, as only God-given morality can but it is a moral teaching rooted in and given in love. It is teaching given by a loving Father to his children. It is teaching given out of solicitude, out of selfless generosity. It is teaching which desires only the good of those to whom it is given, a teaching which offers guidance, enlightenment, security and hope. We have a loving Father who desires only our good and wants us to follow the sure path which will lead us to share his life for ever.

This evening I would like to ask for a firm sense of purpose within all our faith communities as we seek to live our lives in a moral and spiritual way. If it is true that we are privileged people, privileged to have received God's revelation, privileged to follow him in faith, then it is surely essential that we show our gratitude for what we have received by bearing faithful witness to the religious traditions and moral codes we follow.

I would also stress the paramount importance of handing on our religious traditions and moral principles to our young people. Nothing is more urgent than that: it is something which the Jewish and Christian communities have always believed to be an imperative: to allow our young people to be educated in faith, in spirituality, in moral and ethical principles and to experience the life and worship of a believing community. One of the saddest aspects of our society today has to be the appalling neglect of the religious, moral and spiritual formation of our young people. It is so sad to see so many young people who all too clearly have no moral framework for their lives, no heritage of spirituality or prayer, no sound religious principles on which to base their lifestyle and make their choices. We all see the confusion which all too often marks out our society today, a rootlessness and instability which must, surely, be traced back to the lack of proper religious education and formation, for the two must go together.

Tonight I thank you for inviting me to share these thoughts with you. I would like to congratulate the Council of Christians and Jews for all that it does to better understanding and respect between our two great faith traditions. We have been tragically divided in the past. Let's celebrate what we have in common and work together as the children of God to create a better future for our young people, our society and the world in which God has placed us to give glory to his name.