

# ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

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TOWN AND GOWN LECTURE  
'TOWARDS THE MILLENNIUM A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE'  
DELIVERED BY  
HIS EMINENCE THOMAS J. CARDINAL WINNING  
ARCHBISHOP OF GLASGOW

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Can I first of all say how deeply honoured I am to have been asked here this evening to deliver this Town and Gown lecture at Strathclyde University.

I'm very aware of the history of this event and the long line of distinguished speakers you have asked to address you.

### *A great privilege*

Returning to Strathclyde University is always a real privilege for me. But tonight, in a sense, we are all privileged. Privileged, not so much to be here, but to be living at this truly historic time in the history of the world.

So few generations can know the special frisson of history that comes with having a metaphorical foot in two millennia.

Such opportunities oblige us to do three things - to look back, to take stock and to look forward.

My theme tonight - Towards the Millennium, a Catholic Perspective will involve all three, with the emphasis on looking to the future.

But before doing so I must cast an eye back over the last millennium.

### *Examination of Conscience*

In his great "Magna Carta" on the Jubilee of the year 2000, a document called Tertio Millennio Adveniente, Pope John Paul spells out, with sometimes painful frankness, the kind of examination of conscience to which he believes the Church must subject itself in order to enter the new Millennium purified and invigorated.

In many ways the history of Europe in the last millennium is one and the same thing as the history of Christianity.

That history is one of light and shadows.

In the early part of the millennium it was the Church which invested heavily in higher education - the great universities of Paris and Bologna. Salamanca and Oxford - dare I say it here - even the University of Glasgow bear witness to that.

The civilising influence of the religious orders brought the first safety net for society's rejects - many religious orders were indeed set up specifically to care for the orphans, the sick and the dying.

The arts have flourished too in this millennium. From the peaceful splendour of Michelangelo's Pieta to the furious energy of Bernini's St Teresa in Ecstasy, the imprint of Christianity is easy to discover in the continent's greatest artistic treasures.

Later Church social teaching helped shape the foundational principles of the European Union, helped humanise the previously inhumane working conditions of the proletariat, and defended the rights of the poor to a decent standard of living.

But it is not a universally positive picture that emerges. In the last 1000 years Christianity has committed excesses too, excesses which Pope John Paul is quick to acknowledge:

He says: "The Church cannot cross the threshold of the new millennium without encouraging her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act. Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith, which alerts us to face today's temptations and challenges and pre-pares us to meet them."

Next week, the Bishops of France will act on this suggestion by symbolically expressing erpentance for the weaknesses of the French Church's response to the Vichy regime during World War II. Such a gesture, is, I believe, a sign of maturity, not a sign of weakness.

Pope John Paul continues: "Among the sins which require a greater commitment to repentance and conversion should certainly be counted those which have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People. In the course of the thousand years now drawing to a close, even more than in the first millennium, ecclesial communion has been painfully wounded, a fact for which, at times, men of both sides were to blame. "

### **Scotland: A Chequered History**

Today, the Catholic Church acknowledges its own weaknesses and failures. In the name of Scotland's Catholics I acknowledge that there have been moments of our history when excessive zeal rather than gentleness and persuasion have been the order of the day. When understanding was replaced with suspicion, and when respect for others was trampled by misplaced proselytism.

For all of those occasions I ask pardon.

And in turn I offer pardon, in the name of Glasgow's Catholic community for the occasions when we have been the bullied, victimised and rejected members of society.

As the minority faith in this country for the last 500 years or so we too have suffered. From the persecutions and cruelties of the reformation resulting in the brutal execution of St John Ogilvie just a few hundred yards from here at Glasgow Cross to the contemporary exclusion still felt by some Catholics from areas of social, public and professional life on account of their religion.

And so it is a bruised but recovering Catholicism which stands at the threshold of the new millennium. But also a purified and more humane one. A Church, I would hope, in the heart of the world.

### **The present - taking stock**

But tonight, as I said at the start I do not want to focus on looking back. I now want to focus on the present, reading the signs of the times. But before I do so, I'd better explain the link between the present and the future which lies behind much of what I will say.

When I set about writing this address I began to draw together the strands which constitute my vision of a better future.

And in doing so I sensed again, as I've sensed before, a real distinction between vision and dream. My vision has premises, some evidence to go on - it might be defined as an idea put together with a will and determination to shape that idea into a new vision.

My dream, on the other hand, is purely passive - "what I would like to happen", or, as Voltaire's *Candide* put it, what might happen: "in the best of all possible worlds ..."

But in a way, the dream is needed, before the vision can take shape. Allowing oneself to dream can be a liberating experience, opening up horizons that would otherwise remain closed. And if you make your dream something you will work towards, then that becomes your vision.

So in that way both dream and vision come into your concept of perception.

I say this, by way of introduction, because it lies behind the methodology I have used in this address.

Before I go any further I would like to set out my stall quite clearly.

I stand before you, not as a crystal ball gazer, or a futurologist. I am not here to predict what will happen in the years to come.

I am not here as a theologian either - one whose work is to develop Church teaching in the light of new trends and advances.

Neither am I here as a politician - seeking to define new power structures or grappling with refinements of economic theory.

I stand here as a priest, and therefore my interest is in bringing people to God. I must be aware of the needs of the flock that has been entrusted to me, and at the same time lead and guide them, protect and strengthen them.

So a lot of what I have to say has to do with the practical 'here and now' realities of people's social condition, their health and welfare, educational opportunities and spiritual growth.

When I look to the future I do so from a point of view of rationality. I believe the only way to get a glimpse of the future is to read the signs of the times as they are affecting us here and now.

That approach was sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council, which, under the leadership of Pope John XXIII adopted very firmly this world view.

By reading the signs of the times I mean studying the universal trends and aspirations of human beings, their longings and yearnings, their anger and their fears.

As a Christian I read these in the light of faith, trying to discern God's will as manifested in these signs. It is only in studying the reality of today that I can plan for the better world of tomorrow.

### *Signs of the times*

So what are these signs of the times which can act as our roadside markers at present as we grope towards the future?

The first is this: The era of a homogenous Christian culture is gone. Those factors in society which once produced and sustained a nationhood which was in some medieval sense homogeneously Christian, will never return.

They were in any case, often secular factors which used Christianity as a kind of straightjacket into which society was forced.

The second is this. The Church must, at the same time, cling to its mission *ad gentes*, that is its missionary impetus to bring the faith to every man woman and child on the planet, yet at the same time recognise that it can only ever be a community of free believers.

People cannot and must not be railroaded into Church, and for that reason the Church will always be, what Christ himself calls "a little flock".

Our upholding of that freedom to believe, which was so powerful in Eastern Europe as it threw off the yoke of communism, ironically also involves us in upholding the right *not* to believe. Respect for human dignity requires as much.

The third sign of the times I would point to is this. Today, perhaps more than ever before, the Church is having to fight off the constant attacks of secularism.

The onslaught of secularism in its many guises has led to what Pope John Paul calls "the crisis of civilisation," which has become apparent especially in the West - highly developed from the stand-point of technology but interiorly impoverished by its tendency to forget God or to keep Him at a distance.

Some might say what is secularism? Put simply it is that subtle but very real phenomenon of man living as though God did not exist - a kind of practical atheism.

It disguises itself in many ways - for some it takes the form of ethical relativism, for others it will be to smother the spirit with the cushion of materialism, others espouse a kind of New Age mysticism.

However it is expressed, secularism is now rampant in our country.

In place of genuine, lived faith we see - even in the churches - a vague religiosity, incapable of coming to grips with the objectivity of truth and the requirement of consistency.

To this must also be added the widespread loss of the transcendent sense of human life, and confusion in the ethical sphere, even about the fundamental values of respect for life and the family.

It cannot be denied that, even for many Christians, the spiritual life is passing through a time of uncertainty which affects not only their moral life but also their life of prayer and the theological correctness of their faith. Faith, already put to the test by the challenges of our times, is sometimes dis-oriented by erroneous theological views, the spread of which is aided and abetted by what Pope John Paul calls "the crisis of obedience in the Church's Magisterium."

All of these are the many faces of secularism - signs of the times which the Church, and all men and women of good will, must confront.

### **Planning for the future**

But it is not enough to *read* the signs of the times - you have to *do* something about them, and that means planning for the future based on what you have observed.

Looking to the future, for a Christian can seem to be a bit of a schizophrenic thing to do.

We can distinguish between the eschatological future - that is the ultimate realities which will sooner or later face every human being: death judgement, hell or heaven, and the "this world" future as Karl Rahner calls it.

Churchmen are sometimes criticised nowadays for concentrating more on the latter and neglecting the former, but in reality there is no incompatibility.

Rahner says: "The Christian attitude towards the absolute future which is God, neither diminishes nor eliminates the responsibility it entails for a "this worldly" future, but rather imparts a radical dimension to it." (Theological Investigations, vol 12, p191)

The reason is that the only way man can prepare for and merit the ultimate reward in the "absolute future" is by working for justice, love, peace and harmony in this world.

## **The Immediate future**

So what plans should we make for the immediate future - say the first century of the new millennium? In the face of the emerging signs of the times, the Church of the new millennium might be sorely tempted to abandon its principles and opt for what the French call a "*cohabitation*" - a kind of compromise with the world.

To do so would be folly.

Karl Rahner is very clear on this: The Church, if it is to remain one, holy catholic and apostolic, "cannot tolerate, without condemnation any corruption of the pure Gospel within her united social body, nor can the Church retain within it those who seek to uphold heresies, while refusing to leave the Church of their own accord.

"Certainly full freedom of conscience is to be accorded to every individual, but the Church would cease to be the Church of one faith, one creed, of the Gospel and of the right administration of the sacraments, if she were to grant any and every individual to do what the freedom of his own conscience dictated to him within the Church.

"The sphere of freedom of conscience and the sphere of the Church are not identical."  
(Theological Investigations, Vol 12, P195)

So, if compromise with secularism is a blind alley for the Christian, what is the correct method of responding to the signs of the times.

I would suggest it is this: First an acknowledgement on the part of the believer of the reality facing him. Second a confronting of this reality with the demands of the faith, and thirdly an application of the principles of the faith to the concrete reality, in order to change that reality and bring it into greater conformity to the will of God.

## **What future for Scotland?**

Today in Scotland, Christians are at something of an advantage in this task. The recent referendum result has brought a mood for change. The old secular certainties are up for grabs. A new Scotland is about to be forged, and Christians are called to forge it.

As one of the largest constituents of that new Scotland, the Catholic Church has a vision of the kind of country we would like to see flourish after devolution.

Firstly it must be a country that is faithful to its good traditions, and first among those I would list education.

## **Higher Education Funding**

What I am about to say, is, I hope a result of carrying through the reflective process I have just outlined - firstly reading the signs of the times, then confronting this with the demands of faith and justice, and finally applying the principles of faith and justice to that concrete reality.

I have to say that it was with nothing short of astonishment that I returned from holiday this year to discover that student grants had been not just cut back but abolished, apparently without so much as a whimper of opposition from politicians who have spent much of their public life championing the cause of free access to education for all.

This, in addition to the new burden of student fees, is, I would suggest, an alien concept to a Scotland which is proud of its tradition of free schooling and classless academic life.

And so I would see this as one of the true tests of the mettle of the new Scotland. Will it have the courage to give back the gift of opportunity to our young people, many of whom will have seen their dreams of a place at university die, with the announcement of the abolition of student loans?

This great institution of learning in which we are now standing was founded in 1796 by John Anderson. He left instructions in his will that a centre be established "for the Good of Mankind and the Improvement of Science - a place of useful learning."

From its very foundation this institution aimed at a wider variety of students - not just the children of professionals and aristocrats - but all who could benefit from access to "useful learning".

And so it seems appropriate that from this place the challenge should go out to a new generation of Scottish politicians - Give us back our right to education! Let us fulfil our potential! Do not deny us education, the most important tool of all those required to build a new Scotland!

*Today, in your midst, I would call on the leaders of all Scotland's churches to join with me in formally asking the first Scottish Parliament to sit for over 300 years to reverse this retrograde legislation.*

That appreciation of education must not stop at the doors of colleges and universities. Our schools too need the help of a new set of Scottish priorities.

Those priorities must enshrine the right of parents to have their children educated in accordance with their faith priorities. The 1918 Education Act was one of the most far-sighted and impressive pieces of legislation of our century. Its provisions must be safeguarded in the New Scotland.

On the threshold of the new Millennium we should be able to consign to the dustbin of history the image of cold, damp classrooms, children forced to study in hastily constructed huts, and class sizes of more than 30.

Will we be able to do so?

Again the challenge is there for the artificers of the new Scotland.

In a country rich in natural resources our ability to care for the weakest members of society will also be something on which we can be judged.

### **Health and Poverty**

One of the most compelling arguments for opposing the proposed changes in the funding of higher education is this: education, especially higher education, is for many people the only ladder of opportunity available to them to climb out of the mire of poverty.

If you take away the chance of decent, affordable education from the poorest members of society, you sentence them to a life of constant struggle, of hardship and expose them to a whole host of possible consequences including family break-up and mental health problems.

If we are serious about tackling poverty in our midst, the last thing we should be doing is kicking away the ladder of opportunity and self improvement.

Today in Glasgow 42 per cent of children - that is 52,000 young people - live in families dependent on income support. What kind of message of hope are we sending those young people and their families as we prepare for a new millennium, when we talk about abolishing student grants and introducing compulsory fees?

But poverty does not just affect the young.

On the threshold of the new Millennium we should be able to consign to the dustbin of history the image of the elderly shivering in their own homes, afraid to put on heating for fear of expensive bills.

We should banish the spectre of euthanasia which seems to consistently haunt us in these dying years of the second millennium. In a prosperous and caring society, no-one should be made to feel guilty about being alive. No-one should be a burden. No-one should be left without appropriate palliative care. No-one should feel unwanted.

The prospect of a two tier health service stands before us. Are we prepared to accept this?

*Is there not a justification from both a moral and economic viewpoint for transferring resources from defence of the realm to defence of the sick?*

### **Fairness and respect**

On the threshold of the new Millennium we should be able to build a culture of respect for human life - surely able to learn the grim lessons of this century - the lessons of Dachau, of Tiananmen square and of the Gulags?

Is a new Scotland prepared to stand up for the rights of the disabled against those who would deny them, from the womb, the right to life?

Are we prepared to allow the voice of doctors to be heard, who dare to question the ethical orthodoxy of destroying unwanted children in the womb?

All of these questions are ones which I would put at the start of the new millennium. And the answers I receive will give me grounds for optimism or pessimism as I wonder aloud what future is there for a New Scotland

### **What future for Christianity?**

But what about Christianity as a whole. What future is there for it?

I have always sensed there are grounds for optimism as we cross into a new millennium, and many of them.

I think the main one is this. We begin the Third Christian Millennium as truly a world-wide Church - something that could not be said at the start of the second millennium.

It is true that ever since the apostolic age, the Church's mission has continued without interruption within the whole human family. But the first evangelization took place above all in the region of the Mediterranean.

In the course of the first millennium, missions setting out from Rome and Constantinople brought Christianity to the whole continent of Europe. Around 1600 years ago Ninian and later Columba brought the faith to Scotland.

During the second millennium, the end of the fifteenth century marked both the discovery of the Americas and the beginning of the evangelization of that new world.

Within a few decades, while the sub-Saharan coasts of Africa welcomed the light of Christ, Saint Francis Xavier, Patron of the Missions, reached Japan.

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, a layman, Andrew Kim, brought Christianity to Korea. In the same period the proclamation of the Gospel reached Indochina, as well as Australia and the Islands of the Pacific.

The nineteenth century witnessed vast missionary activity among the peoples of Africa. These efforts have borne fruit which has lasted up to the present day.

## Looking Forward in Hope

And so it is that we find ourselves on the cusp of the millennia in a position of relative strength. Today there are more Christians in the world than at any time in history.

The Catholicity of the Church has always been there, but today it is better expressed in the Church's presence in every corner of the globe.

But this apparent success story cannot lead to complacency. A greater number of believers means a greater responsibility on the part of the Church to respond to their needs, offer them sure guidance and safeguard their eternal salvation.

In the centuries to come I would also foresee a new style of Christian leadership emerging.

Pope John Paul is clearly aware of this. In his encyclical on Christian Unity he went so far as to ask other Christians to help him define his role as leader in the faith and servant of the servants of God.

He has taken a lead in creating a new more collegial form of government for the Church. Now, more than ever before bishops are consulted on areas of worldwide interest, our views are taken into account, and many papal documents are written at the behest of the bishops who have asked for clarification or guidance on a particular issue.

I would hope that this trend would continue and become the normal way of governing the Church. While the role of the Pope is clearly more than simply one of *Primus inter pares*, nevertheless, John Paul II has shown that the Petrine ministry can be a ministry of presiding in love rather than ruling by fear.

In the years to come, I would foresee Christian leadership will be a question of holding together different insights and charisms, creating a Church that is big enough for all - for charismatics whose worship is happy and clappy and those who prefer the Tridentine Mass with its elaborate gesture and ritual, for feminists striving for an equality crusade and those devotees of Our Lady of Fatima who strive for a Rosary crusade!

We have to create a Church that is *Mater et Magistra* - Mother and Teacher - both to the young thirsting for justice and the elderly thirsting for piety.

Our challenge is to see past what divides us and to focus on what unites us.

## Ecumenism

And if this is true within my Church, it is equally true between the Churches.

Ecumenism is now at a sufficiently mature stage to allow us to see the struggle *against* other Christian faiths as a thing of the past. That is not to say that we have reached full and visible union, and there is much work and reconciliation still needed between Christians, but together we have a common struggle on our hands.

The new evangelisation of Europe of which Pope John Paul speaks so often, is the task of all Christians, not just Roman Catholics.

I recall taking part in the special synod on Europe called by the Holy Father in 1991 - an example of the kind of collaboration I referred to before - and being moved by the very real and genuine recognition of the gifts each Church and ecclesial communion brought to the Christian message.

The Eastern and Western traditions with their differing liturgies, but common sacramental heritage, two lungs of the same Church. And the churches of the reform with their splendid reverence for the scriptures and earnest example of ministering to each other.

The Catholic tradition can learn from these other traditions, and admire in them the holiness of genuine Christianity lived out to the full.

That synod helped eliminate many of the misunderstandings between European Christians. It accepted that differences remained, but put the emphasis on the job in hand, namely a renewed Christian witness to European society so as to remind that society of its Christian roots and responsibilities.

That synod also recalled the opportunities for dialogue and support with the Jewish people - our "older brothers in the faith" and the many opportunities for a common Judaeo-Christian witness to shared values in European society.

All that was true for Europe, and it is all true for Scotland. Our future is together, not apart. Christians can no longer afford the luxury of disunity.

### *The Glasgow Plan*

The Archdiocese of Glasgow has been wrestling with many of the issues I have touched upon this evening, for many years, and we have in place now a pastoral planning process which seeks to read the signs of the times and respond to them.

The fruit of 15 years of study, reflection and planning is a four-stage effort.

I can sum it up as follows:

Firstly we need to involve the Church in a new missionary activity - the kind of activity Pope John Paul calls a new and second evangelisation.

Secondly we must address this new evangelisation to ALL people, not just those closest to us.

Thirdly the Church has to inspire her members to take up the challenge of evangelising - making them aware that as lay people they have not only the *right*, but also the *duty* to do apostolate.

And fourthly we need to ensure that any new evangelisation does not stop at a kind of intellectual grasp of the faith. It must go deeper, and affect behaviour and attitudes, leading to good example and practice. As Pope Paul VI said: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses ..." (Evan. Nunt, 41)

These priorities for action have been planned and structured in the pastoral plan of the Archdiocese of Glasgow which will take us into the new Millennium.

Part of that plan involves going some way towards creating so-called Basic-Christian Communities in and around the city - groupings which will try to live out the radicality of the Gospel in a way that has much in common with the early Christians.

Our parishes too have seen the flourishing over the last decade and a half, of a new generation of Christians able to collaborate effectively in ministry with their clergy, and committed wholeheartedly to building that four-pillared edifice of apostolate that I have just outlined.

The aim is that parishes should soon be seen as a community of communities, enabling people to experience Christian solidarity at different levels of their lives.

In this way we hope to cross the threshold of hope with a renewed, enlivened and invigorated Church, ready to take its place evangelising a new Scottish Society from within.

The challenges are legion. But the resources are legion too. And chief among those resources is our people - a people well educated and well-informed. And I have to say that the media - and in a special way, the press - has an enormous role and responsibility to play in this.

My hope for the new Millennium and the new Scotland is that we will have a press which will not seek to create new counter-values of promiscuousness, moral laxity and laissez-faire materialism.

Rather we need a press which supports the institutions and values of a decent society - the family, honesty, transparency in public life and compassion for the poor.

The felicitous combination of a new parliament and a new millennium give us all - public, press and politicians alike, the chance to make a fresh start.

Let us take that chance in both hands, and together create a better Scotland.

Today I pledge to you that the Catholic population of Glasgow and Scotland will play its part in creating a kinder, more just, happier Scotland, the kind of nation, and the kind of society, of which we can all be proud.

