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POPE AFFIRMS "HONOR" OF ADDRESSING UK PARLIAMENT

Says Diversity Is Opportunity for Dialogue

BIRMINGHAM, England, SEPT. 19, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI is expressing gratitude for the honor of being invited to address the U.K. Parliament during his state visit, and for the opportunity to meet the queen.

The Pope stated this today during a farewell address at the Birmingham International Airport as he concluded his four-day visit to the United Kingdom.

"In these days," he stated, "I was grateful for the opportunity to meet her majesty the queen," as well as the prime minister "and other political leaders, and to be able to discuss matters of common interest, both at home and abroad."

"I was particularly honored to be invited to address both houses of parliament in the historic precincts of Westminster Hall," the Pontiff said.

He continued, "I sincerely hope that these occasions will contribute to confirming and strengthening the excellent relations between the Holy See and the United Kingdom, especially in cooperation for international development, in care for the natural environment, and in the building of a civil society with a renewed sense of shared values and common purpose."

"During my time with you, I have been able to meet representatives of the many communities, cultures, languages and religions that make up British society," the Holy Father observed.

"The very diversity of modern Britain is a challenge to its government and people, but it also represents a great opportunity to further intercultural and interreligious dialogue for the enrichment of the entire community," he added.

Religion in society

"As Britain is home to so many religious traditions, I was grateful to have the opportunity to meet their representatives and to share some thoughts with them about the contribution that the religions can offer to the development of a healthy pluralistic society," Benedict XVI said.

He noted in particular the "pleasure" of visiting the Anglican archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and the bishops of the Church of England, "and later to pray with them and our fellow Christians in the evocative surroundings of Westminster Abbey, a place which speaks so eloquently of our shared traditions and culture."

The Pope affirmed, "I treasure the time spent with the bishops, clergy, religious and laity, and with teachers, pupils and older people" of the Catholic Church.

"It was especially moving to celebrate with them, here in Birmingham, the beatification of a great son of England, Cardinal John Henry Newman," he said.

The Pontiff concluded, "As I take my leave of you, let me assure you once again of my good wishes and prayers for the peace and prosperity of Great Britain."

The Holy Father departed Birmingham by plane for Rome at 6:45 p.m.

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