

VISIT TO THE VATICAN ARCHIVES

October 2, 1989

During the visit other events took place including a dinner offered on September 30 in honor of the Archbishop of Canterbury by the British Ambassador to the Holy See, and a reception on October 1 at the Palazzo Doria, offered together by the Anglican Center in Rome and the Prince and Princess Doria Pamphili.

On the morning of the last day, October 2, before the signing of the Common Declaration with Pope John Paul II, the Archbishop and his delegation toured the scavi (excavations) under St Peter's Basilica, as well as the Vatican Secret Archives and the Vatican Library.

At the Vatican Secret Archives a special exhibition of documents was prepared highlighting significant events in the relationship between the Church of England and the Holy See, especially during the critical time of the sixteenth century and also in the changed atmosphere of today. Cardinal Antonio Javière welcomed the Archbishop to the Archives.

CARDINAL JAVIERRE'S GREETING

Your Grace,

It is my privilege to welcome you today to the Vatican Secret Archives. I do so most cordially, on behalf of all my staff and in my own name, trusting that you will not take into account my linguistic performance, but rather the sincerity of the sentiments with which I welcome you.

1. We are deeply grateful to you for your visit, which we deem a great honour. We see it as something that has become a tradition for the Archbishops of Canterbury who come to Rome to meet him "who presides in love". Indeed, the Archives were visited by your predecessors, Archbishop Coggan and, before him, Archbishop Ramsey. Allow me to tell you with what esteem and veneration I have always regarded that great pastor, scholar and ecumenist. When I met him in New Delhi, way back in 1961, I had occasion to note that his solid doctrinal grounding and ecumenical openness were founded on a firm historical basis, acquired also through archive documents.

2. I note with pleasure that your ecumenical agenda in the Holy City is in perfect harmony with the conciliar Decree "Unitatis Redintegratio". An important part of it is occupied by prayer. The day

before yesterday, we had the joy of praying together "pro unitate" and, so far as dogma permits, "in unitate", in the recitation of Vespers in the church of St. Gregory the Great. It was one of those outstanding occasions on which we feel not so much seekers of unity, as builders of unity, in communion with Christ, who prays "ut sint unum".

After prayer, the "Unitatis Redintegratio" mentions study and, more specifically, the historical dimension which is decisive for the success of doctrinal dialogue. I am sure that your visit to our Archives will not fail to be noted by the members of the Mixed Commission, engaged in arduous problems of an historical nature.

We, too, are convinced of the important contribution of Archives, for, when they are ecclesiastical, such documents are not mere historical records of a more or less remote cultural past. They are like pulsations of the heart of the Church, which, being One and Catholic, is ever and everywhere alive, in time and in space. They belong to us no less than to those who have gone before us.

That is why the Archives of the Church, true to their character, offer a firm, incomparable foundation for ecumenical dialogue. Here all documents are faithfully preserved and are accessible to all, without discriminations of any sort. They lend themselves, moreover, to study which is free from the limitations inevitable in ecumenical prayer or even in ecumenical collaboration. Here scholars may study "pro unitate" and also "in unitate", in a mutual interchange in their search for truth, in which we shall find unity, because the truth is Christ.

3. Your Grace, we are indebted to you for the support which you bring to our endeavours by stressing their ecumenical dimension. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, ecumenism is a cause which is common to all Christians. Happy are we who have a place in the vanguard!

God grant that the prayer in which we shared in the church of St. Gregory be truly prophetic. In other words, may Saturday's First Vespers soon be crowned by a Sunday Eucharist, celebrated in perfect unity... as Our Lord intended, and as He prayed, and invited us to pray "ut sint unum".

Thank you, Your Grace, and once again, welcome!