

British clergywoman to greet the pope

A scheduled encounter during the pope's state visit to the UK will be a reminder of the two churches' differences

BY RIAZAT BUTT
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Pope Benedict's arrival in Britain breaks new ground on many levels, with a state welcome from the Queen and the beatification of Cardinal Henry Newman. But buried in the itinerary is another and, some would say, more piquant landmark.

Next Friday, the pope will meet the Jane Hedges, canon steward of Westminster Abbey in London and a campaigner for women bishops in the Church of England. It will be the first time the head of the Vatican, which earlier this year declared female ordination a "crime against the faith," shakes hands with a clergywoman.

Their meeting will act as a reminder of the differences and difficulties between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic church. The abbey team is aware of the many historic aspects to the visit.

"We shall greet this pope as our guest. There will be no hint of battle," wrote the dean of Westminster, the John Hall, last week in the *Tablet*, a weekly Catholic newspaper.

An ecumenical evensong will begin with an exchange of peace between the archbishop of Canterbury and Benedict XVI. "I have no doubt that it will be a memorable occasion. Yet it will also be colored by many emotions," Hall said.

It was almost a year ago that the pope created the *ordinariate*, a way for traditionalist Anglicans to convert to Catholicism — their desire prompted largely, but not solely, by the ordination of women. The archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was informed of the initiative two weeks before its announcement.

"It looked at first as though battle lines were being drawn, to the embarrassment of all: papal tanks to be deposited on the Lambeth palace [London home of the Archbishop of Canterbury] lawns," wrote Hall.

However, within a month, amid speculation over Williams' leadership, the two met in Rome, and proclaimed their desire to strengthen ecumenical relations.

This depth of friendship and respect should not be underestimated, says Andrew Faley, of the Catholic bishops' conference of England and Wales, who described the body language at that meeting as "utterly cordial and one of equality."



Church of England bishops listen to the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams as he speaks at the General Synod at Church House in London in February 2008.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

On the subject of the *ordinariate*, which will allow Anglicans to convert but retain aspects of their own heritage, he said: "It might have been more helpful had the archbishop been kept informed. I do not think the *ordinariate* is anything to do with the strength of our relationship."

One senior Anglican also thinks the papal project will have little or no impact on the visit, calling it a "red herring."

Tom Wright, the former bishop of Durham, said: "People leave the Roman Catholic church for Anglicanism and the other way round. It has always been the case, it is two-way traffic."

He dismissed the Vatican's horror over women's ordination as "surface noise," but it is difficult to see past robust views.

At the 2008 Lambeth Conference of the world's Anglican bishops, the Vatican contingent scolded them for failing to reach a consensus on the ordination of women and gays as bishops. Liberal churches were suffering from "spiritual Alzheimer's and ecclesiastical Parkinson's," homosexuality was "disordered behavior."

The Roman Catholic archbishop of Southwark, the Kevin McDonald, said those involved in ecumenical dialogue had to consider where it was leading. "It is a matter of trust and faith."

"The Church of England has been trying to find a way of accommodating people. There is no reason to think there is a pulling back on either side, but there has been a reality check." Anglicans and Roman Catholics were in a "different place" to where they were in the 1960s and 1970s. "People should not underestimate what we do have in common." Previous meetings between popes and archbishops have been heavy with symbolism: Paul VI presenting Archbishop Michael Ramsey with his diamond and emerald episcopal ring in 1966, John Paul II walking with Archbishop Robert Runcie in Canterbury cathedral in 1982.

The sight of Benedict XVI and Williams praying for unity at the shrine of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey in London could be a defining moment: The 11th century English monarch is the patron saint of kings, difficult marriages and separated spouses.

Archbishop of Westminster says pope not fishing for Anglicans

The Catholic leader says the pontiff will not be affected by advance media coverage or protests planned for his visit to the UK

BY AVRIL ORMSBY
REUTERS, LONDON

The leader of the Catholics in England in Wales rejected accusations that Pope Benedict was fishing for converts and said "delicate and difficult" issues existed between his church and the Anglican Communion.

His comments come two weeks before Pope Benedict's four-day trip to England and Scotland, the first papal visit since John Paul II's pastoral visit in 1982 and the first-ever official papal visit to Britain.

Relations between the two churches have been tense since the pope offered disaffected Anglicans opposed to their church's ordination of women and homosexual bishops the chance to convert to Rome while keeping some of their traditions.

"There are delicate, difficult issues between our two churches at the moment," Archbishop of Westminster Vincent Nichols, head of the 5.2 million Catholics in England and Wales, said.

But, Nichols said the offer came after groups of Anglicans repeatedly asked for a response to their request for special provision to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church.

"Sometimes people want to say 'oh, this is the initiative of the pope who is going fishing for Anglicans.' That is not true. He is responding to requests that he has received, and those requests we have to handle sensitively on both sides."

Pope Benedict is due to meet Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, spiritual head of the Anglican Communion and leader of its mother



church, the Church of England, during his stay.

Many Anglicans believe Williams was humiliated by last October's offer, which was made with little advance warning, while some Catholics are unhappy at the terms of the offer, which would allow married Anglican priests to convert.

Nichols said that although the issue was sensitive it would not break the strong relationship between the two churches.

"We have work to do, but we will do it together," he said. "We will not be having harsh words with each other."

It is not clear how many intend to convert, he said. In July the traditionalist Anglican Bishop of Fulham, John Broadhurst, suggested several hundred clergy and many laity would leave in the next three years.

Nichols also suggested the pope would not be

A London bus that passes Westminster Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster, which the pope plans to visit, bears an ad paid for by the Catholic Women's Ordination group. PHOTO: EPA

affected by the adverse media attention ahead of the trip and the protests planned by secularists, gay rights groups, women ordination campaigners and those angry at the child-abuse scandal which has spread throughout the Catholic Church globally.

He pointed to recent papal visits where intense media criticism dissipated, he said, when people listened to what the pope had to say.

"I don't think they will affect him deeply. No. Because I think he is a man who intelligently studies the world, and he knows the ebb and flow of opinion," he said.

Meanwhile, he said the cost of the pope's visit between Sept. 16 to Sept. 19 was likely to rise above \$9 million (US\$13.92 million) — higher than the initial estimate of \$7 million.

The state's share of the bill is likely to rise by 50 percent to \$12 million. The Church has raised nearly \$6 million, and Nichols was confident of raising the outstanding sum.

He also rejected media reports that there was a lack of interest in tickets for the public masses in Glasgow, London and Birmingham, saying "they are pretty well packed out now."

For a fuller version of this interview click on <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld>