

**An address at the Sistene Chapel, Vatican City,
in the presence of the Secretariat of State
and members of the Papal household.
on behalf of the choir of New College, Oxford.**

27 June, 2015.

Your Eminence Cardinal Parolin, Secretary of State, Your Eminences , Your Excellencies, Monsignor Massimo Palombella, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the choir of the College of St Mary the Virgin of Winchester in Oxford, commonly known as New College, and indeed of the Church of England and the Archbishop of Canterbury, I want to say what a great privilege it is to be invited here. To our hosts in this Sistene Chapel, thank you so much for this gracious welcome in this hallowed and historic space. I also bring the greetings of the Right Revd Tim Dakin, Bishop of Winchester, who is unable to be present.

The invitation to the choir is also a generous sign of the capacity of our two communions to share in whatever way we can, in the worth-ship of Almighty God, who made us all, whose image we bear and whose praise is sung this evening.

When we invite each other into each other's sacred space like this we are saying that, under God, what unites us is greater than what divides us. What unites us this evening is the lifting up of hearts and voices to a higher power, to the divine. This makes the unity given in our baptism so immanent while at the same time experiencing a sense of transcendence together.

Pope Sixtus IV, after whom this rebuilt apostolic palace chapel is named, reigned from 1471 until 1484 . New College itself dates from 1379, being the oldest choral foundation in Oxford. Both these dates come from a time before the English Reformation, when we were seamlessly one. We are one in spirit again this evening, and share a good degree of communion as hearts and voices are blended in the praise of the One who made us all, who loves us all and who keeps us all. And we are all surrounded here by deeply compelling paintings of the stories of Moses and of Christ, which are stories we all wholly believe and share.

These last days we have also seen millions of Christians sharing in the wisdom of the new papal encyclical *Laudate Si*, the Pope's discernment of our environmental stewardship today. The Anglican Communion is already gaining so much from these words, paralleled as they were by a similar discernment from Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, and others. Both are hoping for a Christian witness to be felt at the forthcoming Paris talks on the global environment. Many emerging leaders of many denominations and faiths will walk tomorrow to St Peter's Basilica in solidarity with Pope Francis and hear him at midday during the angelus. So many agree with the message of the Holy Father and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

It is also not possible to disagree while we sing together, if the singing is to happen at all. Singing from the same song sheet is such a gift to us all. And so the offering of harmonised music here is surely a sign of the generic oneness of our baptism in Christ, in whom we all live and move and have

our being. The words “unison”, or “harmony”, which are so important in choral work, are the spirit in which we meet and share here and now. And so we can say together with the Royal School of Church Music prayer:

“Grant O Lord that what we sing with our lips, we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives.”

The quest for greater unity in our lives and between our communions is being furthered by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission and the Anglican Roman Catholic Commission on Unity and Mission. Their work is steady, gradual, but sure. We are compelled by the words of Christ “That they may all be One”. The papal Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* surely outlines how this might be progressed in spirit and in truth and is a guide for us all in these complex times.

If you measure the strides taken towards greater degrees of unity between us by decades, rather than by years, you can see the direction and the pace that God is setting more clearly. They say that God walks through history a decade at a stride. It is God, walking ahead of us, who calls us together and calls us on. It is God who will make of this journey the most that can be made, for the sake of the Kingdom. Tonight’s shared singing and hospitality is another small step in this direction.

I thank God for our hosts and for this unique privilege and wonderful opportunity. I believe it will remain in our memories for all of our lives.

Thank you.

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