



- On the 6th March 2009 an article appeared in the Catholic Herald with the headline, and I quote, "The battle for Religious Freedom is just beginning". The article featured Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor's lecture at Westminster Cathedral where he presented a characteristically hopeful vision of the Church's role in British life but he conceded, and I quote the Cardinal, "There was a worrying trend among the country's elite of regarding Catholicism/Christianity as an adversary rather than a partner for the common good". Is the Cardinal right? Let us look at a few instances that might suggest he is:-
- In July 2009 Mr Duke Amachree, a Christian, worked for Wandsworth Council as a "Homeless Prevention Officer". He was first suspended from his job and ultimately sacked. Why? Because he encouraged a client of his, suffering with an incurable medical condition, to believe in God, and to pray to God.
- Under new Equality Legislation, Christians are being removed from adoption panels. Why? Because they are refusing to endorse placing children for adoption with same sex couples.
- Harry Hammond, an elderly eccentric evangelical, was attacked and prosecuted for parading with a placard denouncing immorality and homosexuality, He was physically attacked and assaulted and yet he was then held to have offended.

The list goes on ...mercy killings... sex education...equality laws, and witness the recent 'leaks from the Commonwealth Office on the 'Potential Programme' for the Holy Father's visit. Brothers, I fear there will be serious demonstrations against the Holy Father during his visit in September.

And one final example: This week militant atheists in a North Devon town are objecting to Christian prayers before town council meetings; the National Secular Society has instructed lawyers to take the council to court for a judicial review.

## Oddballs and Minorities!

Is Cardinal Cormac alone? No, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams is at one with Cardinal Cormac on these issues. In a recent address Dr Rowan Williams observed, I quote, "That many Government Faith institutions assumed religion was practised by odd-balls, foreigners and minorities." I wonder which group we fit into!

And so let me come back to the question. What is the relevance of our Association today? Brothers, I have no doubt we are more than a social network. Why? Because between us and through our Catholic Faith Values we as Catenians, spoken or silent, written or unwritten, through our faith share a common dependence on Christ and the Holy Spirit – Our Faith Journey.

I started by saying my Conference theme and theme for the year is Love, Hope and Faith, three fundamental values and part of the 'package' we offer to those we invite to join our Association. Let us then briefly examine Love, Hope and Faith.

***"All true human love however transient and imperfect has in it something of the infinite and eternal.***

***The crucifixion and death of Jesus the Son of God shows such depth of love in its infinity and eternal."***

***Cardinal Basil Hume***

## LOVE

LOVE - St Paul tells us – love isn't love until you give it away – love reflected in respect of fellowship and friendship we share together, wherever and whenever we come together for a meeting, for social events or pray together, there is present an abundance of goodwill, love, and we reflect it with sincerity and great generosity.

I am reminded of Fr Damien, a Belgian priest ordained in 1873 who left Belgium to serve the lepers in Kalaumia, Hawaii. There he established among the lepers a law based on love; he lived his law of love to the end, until he himself died of the disease at the early age of 49. Man has no greater love than to lay down his life for another. I hope I'm not misinterpreted saying there is only One Love but many ways of showing it.

I came across this headline in The Universe, I quote, "The Holiest Catholic is the one who is the most loving and kind" - Fr John Catoir. Over the years history has shown that love is expressed

in different ways; for example, the reading we had a few weeks ago, on the contribution of the two smallest coins made by the poor widow. In Romans, Chapter 12, St Paul tells us, "Let Love be genuine, Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good, love one another with mutual affection". Love is the most creative, powerful and dynamic "motivation" that exists, note the word motivation.

The late Cardinal Hume wrote on love, I quote "All true human love however transient and imperfect has in it something of the infinite and eternal. The crucifixion and death of Jesus the Son of God shows such depth of love in its infinity and eternal". St Paul, I mentioned earlier, tells us love isn't love until you give it away. Do you know the strange thing about this I find is, the more you give love away, the more it comes back. It seems no matter how much we give away, the supply never runs out.

Sometimes when we share with someone an idea or belief that is dear to us, and we sense an immediate negative reaction, we want to move on, change the conversation; but what is more important to us, the approval of our listener or the integrity and love of what we believe? Jesus faced this challenge several times. He was rejected and in the end paid the ultimate price. Let me conclude my sharing on Love with a personal experience.

Within a month of joining my Circle, Woking, I planned to attend the Circle's Annual Charter Dinner, after visiting my wife Evelyn who sadly was in hospital. At the dinner the then Circle President, the late Brother Jim Mackintosh, presented me with a big bouquet of flowers, and asked me to present it to Evelyn with the love, affection, and good wishes of all the Brothers of the Circle. Brothers, that was 23 years ago and I vividly recall the occasion.

## HOPE

Let me now move on to Hope.

HOPE - It is difficult to share my thoughts and feelings on 'Hope' because for me it's something you aspire and look forward to, and anticipate. There is a bit of the unknown, like the little girl aged six who wrote "Dear God, in school they told us what You do, can You tell me who does it when You are on holiday"?

Hope to me is expressed in many different ways: the hunger of children in Third World Countries when they pray "give us today our daily bread", relying on the generosity of charity/missionary workers for their next meal.