



The Archbishop of Canterbury has received an award from American Franciscans for his ecumenical work. Archbishop Welby was given the award at the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement in rural Graymoor in New York State on Saturday (23rd September 2023). Called the Paul Wattson Christian Unity Award, Archbishop Justin is the 14th person to receive it. One of his predecessors, Archbishop Ramsey who was in office between 1962 and 1974, was also a recipient 50 years ago.

Read the full text of his speech, as delivered, below:

Ladies and Gentlemen, Brothers and Sisters in Christ, thank you.

Thank you from both Caroline and myself very, very warmly for your invitation to Graymoor, for your hospitality and for your generosity in making this extraordinary award. I find hearing myself described both deeply embarrassing and also quite bizarre. Halfway through the introduction today, long before Father Clayton, we got to your kind and extraordinarily well-researched speech. I began to think, "Does anyone of you know who this Archbishop is but I'd love to meet him". Reminds me of a comment that the late Queen in the days when she was at her home in Norfolk, Sandringham, she was very normal about going into the village to get something from the corner shop and nobody looked twice. But on one occasion, she was there with her bodyguard. She had one bodyguard, not exactly a 30-car convoy. And a tourist came up and said you look just like the Queen. To which he responded, how very reassuring. And the question that went on, have you ever met the Queen? To which she said, no, and pointed to her bodyguard and said, but he has. So, it's quite reassuring that this person you described is in fact beginning to sound a bit like Sir Humphrey in Yes Minister, if you know that the one who is standing before you. When I look at the names of former recipients, it is a great symphony of extraordinary Christians, and I feel that it ends with a rather weak trumpet bleat of my name.

Take the first recipient of this award, Archbishop Michael Ramsay, a wonderful theologian and a remarkable ecumenist. You will know that in 1966, Archbishop Ramsay met the Pope. It was an extraordinary and historic occasion, the first meeting official meeting between the Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury since the bloodied years of the Reformation, the 130 years of war that destroyed so much of Europe. And they set up a dialogue between the two churches, of course, which became archaic. As they were leaving Saint Paul's in Rome, the Pope drew Archbishop Ramsay aside, he gave him a ring, the same ring he had worn when he was Cardinal Archbishop of Milan. And Michael Ramsey was rightly brought to tears by this gesture of recognition and reconciliation. And so, it has gone from there because the dialogues that have become some of them much longer ago than that, even the Malines Conversations in the 1920s, have developed and spread it, which means that there is a huge network of dialogues across the world. The initiative that the Pope started then has spread in 2016 when I saw the Pope. He gave me a pastoral staff. Two of the Cardinals who were present were in tears because the Pope, particularly this Pope, is supreme in the skills of symbolism. And in doing what he cannot say, great skill. And they realised fully the point of giving someone a pastoral staff.

And in 2019, after a couple of years work by people at the Vatican and two of my colleagues with immense courage, I will say, of working in South Sudan and by a series of events that were very close to, well, weren't miraculous. Pope Francis hosted a retreat for the warring leaders of South

Sudan, the political leaders. And they were accompanied by the religious leaders. I wore that ring then. As I did when we went to Juba in February of this year.

But then at that point in 2019, at the end of the retreat, Pope Francis got up and walked across to the political leaders, knelt at their feet, kissed their feet and begged them to make peace. It wasn't only a remarkable gesture that in an extraordinary way brought back to mind the image of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples knowing that they would abandon him and betray him. But it was a reminder of how far the churches have come in such a short time in following Christ's prayer in John's gospel, as we heard read earlier, to be one. Because, you know, didn't get the headlines. Go do that in the 1950s, it would have been the headlines for days. Do that in 2019, everyone thought, well, yes, moving, yes, okay, good, fine. And what's next? And that may be disappointing in one sense, but in another, it's very encouraging because it's not news anymore. The church leaders get on with each other. It's routine.

And as I join you here, as you yourselves join Episcopal and Catholic traditions in your history, I'm reminded again of the living embodiment of what it means to witness to the prayer that we should be one as Jesus's one with the Father. In that final prayer of Christ and in the farewell discourses in the chapters before 14, 15 and 16, we find actually, that disunity only has three disadvantages. And we didn't really worry about it. The three disadvantages; our first, that it hinders our prayers. God says that when we're one at prayer, our prayers are heard in the courts of heaven. Secondly, it diminishes profoundly our assurance of God's love. God says in the scriptures, in those discourses that when we're united, we will know His love for us. Thirdly, it trips up, slows down and stops our mission and evangelism. For God says in John 17:21 that the world will know that Jesus came from the Father when they see that we're one. So, provided you're happy to abandon prayer, the assurance of God's love and mission and evangelism, there is no problem with disunity at all. But of course, if you care about any of those, it is a significant difficulty.

I would have been very surprised at myself being described as an ecumenist, probably, until quite recently. Until quite recently I have never thought of myself in the same bracket as those who've sat around the tables at the dialogues or being the workers at the coalface of national and international works such as the World Council of Churches. But reconciliation has always been a passion. Even before the ministry at Coventry Cathedral, you will remember Coventry Cathedral, how powerful it is. Bombed into ruins in 1940 the old cathedral is still standing in ruins at right angles to the new one, whose liturgically west wall is glass, so the two are joined together and cry out the story of cross and resurrection. Its twin city is Dresden where the Great Church of Our Lady was only rebuilt recently. Lutherans, reformed and Catholics, would have been amongst the aircrew over Coventry. Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists performed, and Baptists would have been in the aircrew bombing Dresden. How we allow the world's divisions to divide us! How in war, nationalism overtakes peace and the making of peace for the people, the one people of Christ! How we learn to hate and condemn! How we learn to reject and exclude! The work of reconciliation must begin with God's people saying because we are one, we will not be divided. For that reason, we must keep our links with the Russian Orthodox.

We are one in Christ. We may say that certain Orthodox are doing badly, but we cannot say they are not our sisters and brothers. And we must also look to ourselves and our intra-church as well as inter-church reconciliation and ecumenism.

Over the last 50 or 60 years, we've seen a steep rise in fundamentalism across the world in every major faith. Why? I think the causes are more than anything else sociological. When things are changing so fast that people have little time to adjust and to control their ears, it is tempting to, and forgive me for using an out-of-date image from the Westerns from Hollywood, it's tempting to form the wagons into a circle. Circle the wagons, keep the bad folk out and everyone inside is alright. The trouble is, once you've circled them once, you suddenly realise you've got bad people inside as well as out, so you have to circle them again. And that circle happens again, and that circle happens again and you arrive at the point where you're left alone with a very, very small wagon around you. We are dividing more and more.

I weep at the sorrow of Orthodoxy divided by war of Orthodox Christians killing Orthodox Christians on the battlefield as Protestants and Catholics did in World War II. None of us can say we are without sin. And that challenge to be those who are rise only because Christ has reached down to us and lifted us up, those that challenge to rise above these divisions, to challenge them to love despite them. That challenge is set afresh by what your community represents, with its inescapable connection to the ministry of Paul Wattson and the institution of that great ecumenical blessing, the week of prayer for Christian unity.

For at the heart of the lived gospel are not structures, but relationships. We get it wrong so often, don't we? We try and build structures that will encourage relationships. What we actually need to know is that the relationship we have with one another is to love one another and to wash one another's feet and to build structures that make that easy.

We need to renew relationships. And I see that happening amongst church leaders and at the grassroots. So, now we have to take courage in both hands to sacrifice those things that make us different and to be willing to grow together at a time of existential challenges that the extraordinary Secretary General of the United Nations, Guterres, this last Monday at the beginning of the General Assembly of the UN described as the extra 10 existential challenges that show a world off its hinges, facing a great fracture and imply that we are heading towards that fracture, bringing a new and yet more dreadful conflict than those of 1939-45 and 14-18.

So, I honour your work and your example. And can only say once again, deeply moved that in my thanks for this award, you have demonstrated how the spirit of unity, the one spirit who baptises us all fills your hearts. And to encourage that once again, we pray, struggle, sacrifice and turn aside from our differences while maintaining our respect for human dignity and our love for the God who gives us that dignity so that the church may be able to say to the world, cease your fighting and killing. It is possible as we share even after hundreds of years, to find that we can love one another even amidst disagreement. Thank you.

