



## **NEWMAN LECTURE 2013**

### **A THINKING CATHOLIC: SOME DEFINITE PURPOSE**

**Delivered by The Rt. Hon. Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC**

I feel very humbled indeed to be asked to deliver this Lecture.

Your Excellency, Rt Rev Fathers, My Lords, Ladies, Gentlemen, Honourable Members and Friends,

I want to take this opportunity, if I may, to particularly thank Bishop Conry for the honour of inviting me to deliver the second of the three Newman Lectures that are being offered in support of the legacy of Pope Benedict XVI's visit in 2010 to the UK.

It is an honour which has rested surprisingly heavily on me as I contemplated the enormity of what I had been asked to do. I have been a barrister for more than 35 years, Her Majesty's Attorney General and have occupied various ministries of State. You can hardly described me as unused to speaking in public, even when it is about my faith. None of that has ever troubled me unduly. Why was I troubled now and why was I troubled about giving this speech to all of you? I think perhaps it has been because the substance of this speech touches on issues which are of intimate importance to me and I think to others too (many of you in this room).

Newman and His Holiness Pope Benedict are both figures who feature large in the mind of the modern theologian and thinking Catholics, be they Roman or otherwise. Blessed Newman was the quintessential thinking Catholics' Catholic. He is an

extraordinary role model for those seeking to live an integrated life – mind and spirit. Blessed Newman was called and chose to engage in the debates of his time, he was a thinker, whose vocation was to apply his keen intellect and prolific pen to the subjects of the day. And yet alongside that he witnessed to - in how he lived, in what he said and wrote - a deep and transforming personal faith.

As a thinking Catholic, as someone who knew deeply that he was called to a ‘definite purpose’ in life, he continues to speak to our generation today and inspires and challenges me, as a Christian journeying on my way in my time. In fact I believe, whether in the end you agree with him or not, Newman offers everyone an itinerary for thinking about faith and life. His writings are a map for all those trying to seek truth and make sense of life’s tapestry which can be very hard indeed to navigate at times, if you try to make that journey on your own.

And so one of the things that I propose tonight, without apology, is that whichever religion we profess or don’t profess, Newman’s life and example affirms for us all that every life has a purpose and intention; and also that belief, that religion, can positively shape our lives and national conversation if we so choose, informed by the use of our intellect, of reason, irrespective of our levels of perceived intellectual prowess or lack of it.

Newman's life embodied his purpose and I think the same can properly be said of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

The visit of His Holiness in 2010 was an electrifying and momentous event. Some viewed the prospect of his visit with heartfelt joy and anticipation, some with trepidation and anxiety, both for us (his flock) and for him. What would it bring, this visit from this leader of one of the world’s great faiths? Would it bring division or greater understanding and partnership? Would our faith be better understood, would his message of love and peace, human fellowship, be heard in the spirit it was given

and intended?

What those of us, of all faiths, who were privileged to participate in that visit saw, and felt, was love. Gently, generously bestowed, healing many old hurts and giving reassurance and confidence that understanding of difference was possible. It provided a balm which many didn't realise they needed until it was applied and the relief was palpable.

I participated in the multi-faith meeting held by His Holiness where members of the great world faiths came together to share and discuss issues of common concern. It was a moving event. Bringing together those of great difference and those of common understanding. It started a conversation which has continued ever since and which I hope will deepen and never fade.

I remember vividly sitting in Westminster Hall in Parliament when His Holiness addressed Politicians, Diplomats, Academics and Business Leaders. It was an historic moment which I don't think many of those present could have ever imagined seeing in their lifetimes. It was a moment in time that was made all the more extraordinary (and the significance was not lost on anyone) by the fact that it was in this same Hall that St Thomas More had been tried for treason in July 1535. The Pope stood just yards from the plaque in the middle of the floor commemorating More's condemnation. This same place would have been well known to More, who served as Speaker of the House of Commons prior to becoming Lord Chancellor of England.

Reminiscing tonight of that great day once again, I am reminded of the words that the Pope addressed to us on that day:

“...the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilisation... Religion, in other words, is not a problem

for legislators to solve, but a vital contributor to the national conversation.”

As I sat in Westminster Hall— these words of His Holiness resonated with me powerfully, because as a lawyer and parliamentarian the importance of using both faith and reason to serve the common good, has been a significant and enduring part of my life’s experience. I have needed both to fulfill the roles which I have chosen and been called to fulfil. Both have been vital to my personal and professional life: the two beats of the heart at the centre of it.

Blessed John Paul II his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, describes this process more eloquently than I can as follows:

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves (cf. Ex 33:18; Ps 27:8-9; 63:2-3; Jn 14:8; 1 Jn 3:2).

These words together with those of His Holiness Pope Benedict have fallen on fertile soil in our country.

In the UK we have prided ourselves on being a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious country which has for centuries enjoyed peace within our borders with little interruption. Ours has, in the main, been a history of tolerance and restraint. The valiant struggles that have peppered our history have, in the main been, won by the moderate and temperate as opposed to the violent and intemperate. I say ‘in the main’ because the legacy of our joint history still leaves difficult echoes which are being played out in our time as we seek to redress the imbalances and discrimination which remain their fruit. But the gains have been hard fought and hard won, and I believe are worthy of celebration.

After the Second World War the British from the four corners of the Commonwealth came home and the impact on the culture, diversity and complexity of that migration has been significant. It has added to the richness, wealth and well being of our country but it has brought with it challenges, a need for greater understanding and an appreciation of difference not only in culture but religion too. Theoretical understanding of the other no longer suffices when the other is your neighbour, goes to school with your children, to work with your wife, plays competitive sport with your son, challenges your space in the work place, does or does not kneel beside you in your place of worship and forms part of the bodies, institutions and very government that determines the rules by which you live your life. Understanding the other takes on a dimension in the UK of today which was not dreamt of in the United Kingdom of yesteryear, whose understanding and tolerance could be navigated at a distance and the chance of your children living with, marrying and sharing their lives with "the others" was a remote and dismissible possibility.

Faith in the current context , "where it is upfront and personal", is a very different creature. It's a journey which we in the UK have travelled for the whole of the Queen's reign and her love of the Commonwealth and her understanding and love of its people has formed part of the patina which has shaped the backcloth of the struggle for peace between the races, religions and regions of this country for the last 60 years.

Faith is sometimes said to represent hope over experience. It's what is necessary to be able to keep on believing that peace within the classes, religious, non religious and people's of the different regions is possible.

It is faith which has caused the leaders of the great faiths of our country to bind together, to meet, to talk, to listen and to try to better understand each other. Each strong in the belief they share with adherents to their own faith, but each hungry to

find a channel through which their belief in God can flow. For those of faith it is that belief in that Eternal Other which binds them to seek to better understand.

The extreme edges of most religions are similar: there is where anger, violence, intolerance and belief in superiority, usually lies; but the centre of all the great faiths are similar too. The thirst for peace, the hunger for justice, parity of treatment, kindness, humility, selfless acts of charity, compassion and love.

Like our human DNA more than 99.9% of the great faiths message is the same and provide comfort and succour for those in pain and in need of solace. They provide a recipe for a life well lived.

I'm thinking first of my own religion where Jesus was asked by someone in my profession - the law - what is the greatest commandment of the law.

'Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'" (Mt 22: 37 – 40)

The two commandments Jesus gives were not new. He deliberately quoted the central tenets of another religion, namely Judaism.

We can find the first commandment in the Book of Deuteronomy. And the second in the Book of Leviticus. The commandment to love your neighbour is the commandment of the Torah.

The same spirituality of compassion can be found in the words of the Buddha and in the Sikh and Hindu faiths.

It's also in the Holy Quran, which states: "if anyone saves a person it will be as if he has saved the whole of humanity".

The Holy Quran also states, "We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."

The tragedy of our history is that the norm is to concentrate on the 0.1% which separates us as opposed to the 99.9% which joins us one to the other. The 0.1% is always of great importance; it is that which distinguishes us one from the other, makes us male or female, black or white, gay or straight, strawberry blond or brunette, Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh; the 99.9%, is that which makes us human and each, in the eyes of God, in whom the majority of the world believe in one form or another, his child.

In 1953 a young Muslim gave Michael Henderson a book, *The Sayings of Muhammad*, with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi written in 1938 which read:

‘I am a believer in the truth of all the great religions of the world. There will be no lasting peace on earth unless we learn not merely to tolerate but even to respect other faiths as our own. A reverent study of the sayings of the different teachers of mankind is a step in the direction of such mutual respect.’

Gandhi also said we have to be the change we wish to see in the World and I humbly agree. That change should start with understanding the basis of all the great faiths, studying what joins us.

I have to confess that is the tenet upon which I was brought up.

I am, as some of you may know, the 10th of my parents 12 only children and a product of a mixed marriage. My parents' contention was they only had one of each of us and thus we were each unique. My mother was a devout Dominican Roman

Catholic who said the angelus four times a day and my father was a devout Antiguan Methodist who read the bible every day (or rather always seemed to because I swear he knew every passage in the bible by heart). They married in Dominica in 1937 by Papal dispensation and I am told they were the first couple of mixed faith to be allowed to marry by way of a full nuptial mass in the Catholic Cathedral. I think their ecumenical union was seen as rather extraordinary at the time because neither was prepared to give up their strongly held belief in their own faith. Had my father not died in the January of 2007 they would on 12th August of that year have been married for 70 years. Neither ever converted to the others faith although their appreciation and love for the faith enjoyed and believed in sincerely by each grew stronger with every year of their marriage. My father would listen with pleasure as my mother said the Angelus, tell her when "her Mass" was on the television (which seemed to be pretty constant as she reached into her ninetieth year) and my mother would welcome the Minister when he came to visit when my Father became too infirm to leave the house. I have to tell you that I think he came for the cake.

Whilst I was growing up we lived next door to an orthodox synagogue and on the corner adjacent to my house was a shop run by the Patels whose kindness and consideration made everyone welcome. I spent more time in the synagogue whilst I was growing up than I probably spent at church. We were allowed to join the Jewish Youth Club and would switch on the lights for Shabbat in winter and help to make the Sabbath more comfortable if the need arose.

Always my parents would say look for what joins you. Every person on this earth is God's child and you should look for him in the faces you see. Know that what you say and do to others you are saying and doing to him. You are not responsible for what others say and do but you are responsible for your reaction to them. That is within your control. God has given us each a talent and it is our job to find that talent, hone it and then use it for the benefit others. Through his grace all things are possible.



It's an approach that has stayed with me throughout my life. I am a woman of faith and am not ashamed to confess that all I have achieved in my life has been by his grace, every good thing has been by his inspiration and where I have failed it has been my own error. The reason I say that, is that if you can look back and think of this child who was the tenth of twelve children living in Walthamstow, how many bookies would have taken a bet that she would become Her Majesty's Attorney General? I wish I'd put that bet on because I would have been a wealthy woman.

I am often asked how is it possible that you, a child from a tiny island in the Caribbean with little more than 60,000 people, born into a large family of twelve children, the daughter of a carpenter, brought up in Walthamstow in the east end of London, educated in a comprehensive school, neither Oxbridge educated nor affluent, could end up as the first woman to be appointed as Her Majesty's Attorney General in the 700 year history of that office, and the answer is simple: by His grace.

My parents believed that every person is the arbiter of their own good fortune and if you worked hard and put yourself at God's service all things were possible according to his will. The essence was being ready to serve and use whatever gifts he gave you to help his people, and his people were not just the people you knew who were kind and friendly to you, it included all those who weren't, those you had never met but who may be affected by the choices you made, what you did and what you failed to do. Each of us was a channel of His peace. We were his hands to do his work, his feet to walk beside others, his mouth to speak the word which would bring balm and succour to those in despair, his ears to listen and to learn, his heart to love and to share and show compassion. We, all of us, are and would always be his body, if we chose. I am my parents' daughter and it is and has always been what I have chosen to attempt to do too.

I have been called courageous, bold and brave, amongst other things - usually by civil servants in an attempt to save me from myself when they are trying to tell me that

that I wanted to do is impossible, bordering on the insane. But I don't believe that I am insane or perhaps only a little bit. But I do believe that what I have tried to be is faithful and I believe by doing that it has been possible to bring about change. By having faith that change was possible, that human beings are capable of great kindness and generosity of spirit and that together through joint endeavour, and by his grace all things are possible.

It is by and through faith and working with others of faith, and those of none, that we whilst the Labour party was in government, working with others in the third sector, business and local government and compassionate individuals, we reduced Domestic violence in our country by 64% and reduced the economic cost of domestic violence to our country by more than £7 billion per annum.

In 2005 whilst I was still Minister of State for Criminal Justice, I created the Corporate Alliance against Domestic Violence which became a charity in 2010 and subsequently, in 2011, the Global Foundation for the Elimination of Domestic Violence; which together with Peace One Day has formed the Global Truce 2012 to Reduce Domestic Violence and we've now started the Global Truce 2013. The Global Truce 2012, which together with Peace One Day, formed the Global Truth to Reduce Domestic Violence, was a coalition which brought together more than 208 organisation in 85 countries to tackle violence and to build an alliance to promote peace in homes where conflict prevails. Through our partnership with Peace One Day we have been able to reach over 280 million people within 12 months and by 2016 it should rise to over 3 billion. If only one per cent of this number helps to change the world's approach to and acceptance of domestic violence - it would have made a significant impact.

Domestic violence affects 1:4 and 1:6 men in this country and worldwide is the greatest cause of morbidity in women and girls. It respects not religion, economic status, colour or creed and 1:3 women in the world will suffer some form of domestic

or sexual abuse in their lifetime. It brings dysfunction in its wake, not just for the victim, but to those other members of the family whose tentacles it touches. In our own country it will affect 750 -950,000 children. Their life chances will be seriously adversely affected by witnessing or experiencing such violence. They will often fail to thrive, fail to meet their developmental and educational milestones and suffer long term and lasting damage. Such children are over represented in the criminal justice figures, higher percentage are found to suffer from mental illness, drug addiction and are over represented in the criminal justice population. So bringing peace to the home is a major challenge and it is a problem for people of all faiths and those of none.

It is not just in this area that we have seen people with faith binding together to bring peace.

We saw it on 7th July when bombs struck London with such viciousness. The 6th July had been a day of great joy and achievement for the UK. We had brought the Olympics home to London, beaten off the competition by displaying the fruits of our multi-lingual, multi-cultural multi-faith population. We displayed to the world and made plain that if the Games came to London the peoples of the world would be coming home, because every race and every creed could be found in the faces of the New Britain. They would find their food, their language their humour, their faith. A *mélange* which would delight and entice, welcome and thrill. People of all nations lived together in peace in our country and we would put on an Olympic Games similar to that which the world had never seen, rejoicing in our diversity. We would inspire a generation. Now we all remember it.

That joy, that peace was shattered on 7th and I'm sure the men of violence believed that with their bombs they would shatter our faith in each other, divide and separate us from our faith that we could build a rich and peaceful union. The bombs were planted in areas where diversity thrived and many Muslims were affected and some, fatally wounded, died with Londoners and people of other faiths. The bombers

doubtless hoped our joy in the Olympics would be diminished, if not extinguished, fear and dissent would follow and our harmonious co-existence between the faiths would be fractured.

One of the truly magnificent testaments to the journey by faith to peace, which many in our country have been on, was provided in the response of the faith leaders and our religious communities to that atrocity. With what appeared to be one voice they said: we will not be divided, we will stand together for peace, cemented in our determination that terrorist and the harbingers of hate will not succeed. So from that terrible act there came hope. Perversely, there was reason to feel pride as London struggled back to her feet within 24 hours, Londoners got back on with their lives with a gritty determination not to be cowered and to stick it out, together. Our newspapers were filled with almost shocked surprise. The union between faiths, steeped in hard work and hard won understanding, had born fruit, and the fruit was peace.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, expressed the feeling for everyone when in his Statement on London Terrorist Attacks he spoke of his horror and grief following the explosions in London on the morning of 7th July. Speaking whilst on an interfaith visit to West Yorkshire, Dr Williams said:

"The appalling events in London this morning have shocked us all. So I want first and foremost to extend my personal sympathy and condolences to everyone who is suffering and grieving at this time.

"All those caught up in this tragedy - and that includes of course the emergency services whose selfless dedication and commitment is so vital at times like this - all are in my own prayers and in the prayers of a great many people.

"As it happens I have spent this morning with Muslim colleagues and friends in West Yorkshire; and we were all as one in our condemnation of this evil and in our shared sense of care and compassion for those affected in whatever way.

"Such solidarity and common purpose is vital for us all at this time of pain and sorrow and anger.

"We in the faith communities will have to continue to stand and work together for the well being of our nation and for our shared understanding of the life that God calls us to. I hope that we shall all keep that vision alive at this deeply sad and testing time."

When the Olympics finally came they were the triumph everyone hoped for, not just because we won so many glorious medals (but I have to tell you that I think it helped), but because the United Kingdom was displayed in all her glory, multicultural, multilingual , multi faith, happy, helpful and at peace. We did inspire a generation and I think we did it by faith. Faith in what's best in this country, faith in each other, those of faith and those of none.

But, what I suppose there still remains is the question why would a child brought up to believe in the intrinsic value and beauty of humanity; that you have a right to choose between different branches of our faith, to find a path to God which is true to yourself, not determined by the path taken by others, even by those whom you love, but governed by reason and belief, choose Catholicism? The truth, for me, notwithstanding all it's complexities and intrinsic challenges, and the fact others made a different choice, is really this: it was the only one which made sense to me. And so I suppose, that is why, as a thinking Catholic, which I hope with some definite purpose, I'm still here.

Ends

8 February 2013