



'We are no longer adversaries,' Pope tells Church of Scotland Moderator

By Ian Dunn

POPE Francis told the Moderator of the Church of Scotland that we are 'no longer adversaries' and it is a great gift that Catholics and Protestants in Scotland can now live in 'fraternity.'

He told the Moderator of the General Assembly, Right Rev Dr Derek Browning, that the two denominations now enjoyed a relationship of 'mutual understanding, trust and cooperation.'

The two men met for the first time at the Vatican in Rome on October 26 (above).

Dr Browning presented the Holy Father with a Church of Scotland Guild tartan scarf, a basket of Scottish produce and a special edition of a book about the history of St Columba and Iona Abbey.

Addressing the moderator, Pope Francis said: "Let us thank the Lord for the great gift of being able to live this year in true fraternity, no longer as adversaries, after long centuries of estrangement and conflict. This has been possible, with God's grace, by the ecumenical journey that has enabled us to grow in mutual understanding, trust and cooperation."

"The mutual purification of memory is one of the most significant fruits of this common journey. The past cannot be changed, yet today we at last see one another as God sees us."

Pope Francis—who also received Rev Dr George Whyte, principal clerk to the General Assembly, Rev Dr John McPake, the Church's ecumenical officer, and the Moderator's chaplain, Anne Mulligan—said all Christians were brothers and sisters.

"For so long we regarded one another

from afar, all too humanly, harbouring suspicion, dwelling on differences and errors, and with hearts intent on recrimination for past wrongs," the Pope said. "In the spirit of the Gospel, we are now pursuing the path of humble charity that leads to overcoming division and healing wounds. We have begun a dialogue of communion, employing language befitting those who belong to God."

Common good

Pope Francis said the Church had enjoyed decades of fruitful cooperation with the Church of Scotland and the World Communion of Reformed Churches and 'desires to continue on this path.'

Dr Browning told the Pope that the Church of Scotland wanted both denominations to work together for the common good, particularly in the face of national and international anxiety expressed in 'sectarianism, anti-semitism and Islamophobia.'

Addressing the Pope, the Moderator said: "I greet you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is also my privilege and delight as Moderator to bring you greetings in the name of the General Assembly from your sisters and brothers in the Church of Scotland."

Dr Browning said hospitality is the distinctive mark of the Christian Church.

"If we are in a position of privilege, it is better to build a longer table than a higher fence," he added. "My church seeks to ensure that the ministry of our church continues to reach out to every area of Scotland's life, and to reaffirm that the strength of our church, is to be found at the local, parish level. Next year the Church of

Scotland celebrates 50 years of women ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Two years ago we celebrated 50 years of women being ordained to the eldership."

Reflecting on his time with Pope Francis, Dr Browning said the first thing he noticed was the warmth of his smile, the strength of his handshake and the intelligence and concern in his eyes.

"The Pope talked about his deep concerns for the people of Myanmar in south-east Asia, and especially the Rohingya people and the persecution that many are living with today," he said. "He has a particular concern for all refugees and asylum seekers, and was interested to hear about the work of Mediterranean Hope, a charity which works with refugees in Italy who have come from the Middle East and Africa."

Unity

Dr Browning said he and Pope Francis led the Scottish delegation group jointly in saying the Lord's Prayer together.

"It was one of those wonderful moments of unity which reaches across our denominations and reminds us of the centrality of our Faith based on Jesus of Nazareth," the Moderator said. "The interview was not all seriousness and there was a lot of laughter and fun."

"The Pope noticed my socks and commented that I was certainly more colourfully dressed in my footwear."

Dr Browning and his colleagues were given a private tour of the Sistine Chapel, private apartments in the Vatican, and St Peter's Basilica, taking in the breathtaking views of Rome from the roof.