

SPEECH BY
THE DELEGATE OF THE
SACRED MILITARY CONSTANTINIAN ORDER OF ST GEORGE,
HE MR ANTHONY BAILEY, OBE, GCSS,
AT STATIONERS' HALL LONDON EC4 ON FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER 2011

Distinguished guests, dear friends,

On this most historic occasion, in this most historic place, I would like to begin by welcoming, most especially, our Grand Master, HRH Prince Carlo of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Castro, on his first visit to our shores since his appointment as Grand Master, together with Princess Camilla, Duchess of Castro; and secondly, His Eminence, Renato Raffaele Cardinal Martino, on his first visit here as Grand Prior. The Constantinian family has many members and delegations across the world, but united under the paternal leadership of these two eminent temporal and spiritual leaders: Your Royal Highness, Your Eminence: *Grazie tante per la vostra presenza fra di noi.*

The historical role of the Bourbon family and in particular Your Royal Highness's branch, which ruled southern Italy until 1860, is an impressive one. Yet with the unification of Italy and the lost of both the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Papal States your family did not slip into the pages of the past, but set about recreating a

vigorous tradition of service to others in such a way as to win the admiration and respect of both the spiritual and political authorities of Italy and the Holy See to this day. In this regard I was also delighted to learn from His Eminence Cardinal Martino that the Constantinian Order since August this year has achieved Observer Status of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in Geneva and New York.

Your Royal Highnesses, we want to thank you for your support of our delegation, and for your very direct and hands on approach to our organisation.

We are delighted, Your Royal Highnesses that you have been invited today to take the Freedom of the City of London and are very pleased to have with us Sir Gavyn Arthur, former Lord Mayor, as well as the Chamberlain of London.

I don't know if Your Royal Highnesses are fully aware of the privileges which come with being a freemen. You can wander through the City with your sword drawn at any time you like; and you have the right, when drunk and disorderly, to be escorted back by the watches – although whether back to Italy I am not clear. And there used to be a right that allowed Freemen to bring sheep across London Bridge.

Tonight's dinner mixes, very fruitfully and very unusually, the long traditions of our Constantinian Order, with the ancient guild and

livery traditions of the City of London. Both originate in an era when solidarity went along with discipline, righteousness and faith. Peter Ackroyd in his book on London captures the inseparability of the religious and the mundane in our medieval city. Like our ancient Orders, Guilds were extended families, assisting people through times of crisis, gathering resources and relationships and channelling them to make the world a better place – but always imbued with religious faith, captured in the title of “worshipful company” which the Guilds still use today.

Since November last year the head of our “worshipful company” has been His Eminence, Cardinal Martino. He reaches us at the culmination of a career for which the word “distinguished” seems insufficient. After many years of service as a Vatican diplomat serving in many corners of the globe, he has been Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples. Whether opposing the 1991 invasion of Iraq and the sanctions which followed, or representing Pope John Paul II’s firm stand for life at major international conferences on population and women, His Eminence has been a consistent ambassador for Christ. For a global Order, seeking justice and peace across the borders of

nationalities and faiths, it is a great blessing and privilege to be under Your Eminence's guidance.

I would like to extend a special word of special welcome, also, to five other distinguished church leaders among us: our Delegation Prior, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, Archbishop emeritus of Westminster, needs no introduction; nor does Lord Carey of Clifton, Archbishop emeritus of Canterbury, or the current Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Nichols, nor Archbishop Athanasius Toma of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Britain. Your Eminences, My Lord, Your Grace: thank you for being among us and honouring us with your presence.

The mention of our church leaders leads me naturally to draw your attention to the magnificent exhibition of King James Bibles put up here in the Stationers' Hall. Our delegation meets in the year of the 400th anniversary of the publication of that great English translation, which has left an incalculable imprint on our language and habits of speech; and in which English-speaking Christians of all traditions can rejoice. Considering that 400 years ago it took 50 Anglican divines just seven years to produce the greatest and longest work in the English language, Catholics may be forgiven for wondering why, in the age of email, our new translation of the Missal – a considerably smaller text -- has taken three times as long!

We are also blessed tonight with the presence of John Bruton, former Taoiseach of Ireland together and his family. John you are most welcome and I hope you will bring back to Dublin the warmest best wishes from this proudly two-nation organisation.

We are most grateful, too, for the presence of our new Apostolic Nuncio to the Court of St James's, Archbishop Antonio Mennini, as well as a dozen ambassadors and high commissioners – Your Excellencies, you are most welcome.

On Thursday next week Pope Benedict XVI will arrive in Assisi for a gathering of religious leaders, in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the first such gathering, in 1986. It was Pope John Paul II's conviction that what unites the faiths is far more important than what divides them, and his belief that the religions need to be the primary bridge-builders in our fractured world, that led him to call that first Assisi meeting.

Our Order is proud of the relationships of cooperation and trust we have built across the boundaries of faith and race, relationships which lead to understanding that bears fruit especially in times of tension as we see across the world.

Our Constantinian Order will to continue to play a significant role, as it has done, and as the President of Ireland referred to in her message, quietly but effectively, over the years, in fostering that new

peaceful order of coexistence and one based on religious freedom and mutual respect.

Reflecting on his great visit here a year ago, Pope Benedict XVI during his Papal Visit to Britain described the United Kingdom as “a crossroads of culture and the economy”. In addressing us, he said he had had a much wider audience in view. “I kept in mind the entire West,” the Holy Father said, “conversing with the intellect of this civilization and communicating the unfading newness of the Gospel in which it is steeped.” And he went on to speak of his conviction that “the ancient nations of Europe have a Christian soul, which is one with the ‘genius’ and history of the respective peoples”. The Church, he said, never stops working to keep this spiritual and cultural tradition ceaselessly alive and must now do so in new ways.

The term he uses to describe the aim of re-presenting the Gospel to our post-Christian cultures is the “New Evangelisation”. The task of the New Evangelisation is to imbue temporal values again with the vision of the Gospel. But we cannot do that, says Pope Benedict, merely by assuming that the patrimony of values handed down by the Christian centuries will continue to inspire and shape the future of our society.

Reflecting on his invitation to embrace this challenge, the bishops of England and Wales on the anniversary of the papal visit have identified three priorities -- to promote a culture of vocation,

marked by a confident Catholic faith; to proclaim Christ and his Gospel as saving truth by encouraging a culture of dialogue and solidarity; and to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God by supporting marginalised and vulnerable people. These three aims are summed up as a new “confidently Catholic” outlook.

I hope that the 40 new and 200 existing members of the Constantinian Order of Saint George in Britain and Ireland are able already to see that how the Order seeks to embody these three priorities.

The culture of vocation is alive and well around this table today; we have all heard the calling into what the Blessed Cardinal Newman called “some definite service”, and we mark ourselves out from others, and from our own previous lives, by the vows we take, and the commitments to service and prayer we make in our lives. The expansion of the Order’s membership worldwide, now numbering some 3,000, and including more than 50 cardinals and archbishops, has been notable. And here is my opportunity to welcome warmly all our guests from overseas, among whom are the delegates and vice delegate of the Order from The Netherlands, Belgium and Sicily; and if I might single out one couple in particular, I would like to thank Cyril and Lorna Woods, who have come from Mexico to be with us tonight.

In Britain and Ireland we have gone from perhaps 50 members ten years ago to around 200 today, and I want to express my warm thanks to the Chancery staff, vice-delegates and council members for their assistance in achieving this. Today's wonderful investiture ceremony presided over by Cardinal Martino and our Sub Prior Archbishop George Stack of Cardiff, and in the presence of the Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons and 500 guests, saw a cross-section of people from all walks of life being honoured. Perhaps there is a lesson here: that we need not be afraid to suggest to others that they, too, have a calling to some definite service, a calling such as the one the Order has fostered in these islands since the first known Irish knight in 1728 and the first known British one in 1801.

Indeed, the new members invested today and whom I warmly welcome, have all, in some way, been invited to consider the Constantinian call by another member; and take on the responsibilities that come with membership, of promoting the Catholic faith and of serving the needs of the vulnerable. From this very small group of men and women, working with the hierarchy, have come remarkable activities of which the Order is justly proud.

One of these is precisely the encouragement of a culture of dialogue and solidarity, the bishops' second area of focus. Through the Royal Order of Francis I, which was created in the mid-1800s to

honour people of other denominations and faiths and indeed those of no faith but who have contributed to the well being of their society, we have been able to build close relationships in the spirit of Assisi. It was through the vehicle of the Order of Francis I that Constantinians were able to arrange interfaith conferences between 2002 and 2005 in Gibraltar, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen and again most recently in Bulgaria and Italy. Such gatherings show how we are brought together *because* of our faith, not *in spite of* it, and this message is one that needs to be heard loud and clear in our contemporary culture, which can only see conviction as intolerant.

The third of the bishops' three priorities -- to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God by supporting marginalised and vulnerable people -- is also, of course, deeply embedded in the life of our Order. Since 2000, the Delegation has raised more than £1m for many outstanding charities and projects, the Apostolic Nunciature in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, CityWise in Dublin which welcomes vulnerable young people, St Dunstan's charity for blind servicemen, the last year's Papal Visit to the United Kingdom or The Passage Centre for the homeless here in London, whose chair, Sr Ellen Flynn, is here tonight. The support given by our members is not just financial, but also the support of time – sharing skills and expertise, or volunteering on the soup run, each according to what they can manage. We support the vulnerable in other ways too, for example

by supporting the Forthspring Community Centre in Belfast and the All-Party Pro-Life Group in Parliament, chaired by Jim Dobbin MP, who is also among us tonight.

Those are our commitments to the new evangelisation. But we do so in our own, distinctive way. What is that distinctiveness? It is our consciousness of the Order's aristocratic and noble heritage. While the origins of the Order lie almost exclusively within the confines of the royal and noble families of Europe, the idea of nobility has been understood more broadly in recent years, to include nobility of spirit and of deed. Like nobles of old born into privilege, our precious bequest is that we all been given much, and therefore we must all give back.

That is why we are proud to be connected to this Order, even at the risk -- and I suspect it is an occupational hazard for me especially -- of being on occasion misunderstood as archaic or anachronistic. But our ancestry and our valuing of those traditions are precisely what enable us to give a message about God's gifts, and the responsibilities and duties which flow from them -- to proclaim our faith; to build a spiritual humanism of peace with others who do not share our faith, in the Spirit of Assisi; and to serve the vulnerable and the marginalised through our deeds and donations.

Dear distinguished guests, dear friends, I am very confident that, with your commitment and prayer, the Order will continue to

grow and to do good. Thank you for all you have done, are doing and will do, for the new evangelisation, in the spirit of Assisi, conscious of our great heritage, for the sake of God and our fellow human beings. Thank you.