

The following resolution was unanimously agreed at a meeting of the General Presbytery on Friday 3rd September.

FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ULSTER



The Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster views the state visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Kingdom with dismay and abhorrence.

Many citizens do not welcome this visit by the Head of the Vatican State on financial, constitutional and on moral grounds. Recent events have revealed the deplorable cover-up by the Roman Catholic hierarchy of the systematic abuse of innocent children by priests.

Our Church's opposition is based on scriptural convictions and because of the deeply offensive and insulting nature of Pope Benedict's claims and creed. It is not on grounds of blind sectarianism: it is not the product of an innate hatred of all things Roman Catholic. We bear no ill will towards our Roman Catholic neighbours, but rather wish that all people might enter into the freedom of the glorious Gospel of Christ.

Titles such as, 'Holy Father', 'Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church' and 'Vicar of Christ' historically have been viewed by Protestant churches as blasphemous because they are at variance with Scripture in that they usurp titles that belong to the Trinity. As Reformed Evangelical Protestants, we totally reject the arrogant claim that Joseph Ratzinger is the "Sovereign Pontiff of the Church." We recognise no Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church has claimed that, 'as a guest of Her Majesty he comes primarily as a visitor to all the people of the UK, not just those who are Catholics'.

In light of this his visit can not be construed as simply pastoral. We therefore publicly disassociate ourselves from any welcome given to him and repudiate those Protestant churchmen who will welcome the Pope, meet with him, refuse to publicly condemn his teaching, or remain indifferent. By their actions they not only give credence to his spurious claims but are betraying the very creeds they once professed to believe teach and defend. Those historic creeds of the Protestant Churches have recognised that the Pope by his claims has placed himself in the place of Christ and therefore have termed him –'The antichrist in the Church' ('anti' means *in place of*).

The Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 25 Section VI which our ministers and elders sign at ordination reads,

‘There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.’

Further, the timing of his visit is ironic and insensitive. This year marks the 450th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland when, in August of 1560, the then Scottish Parliament declared itself free from Papal domination.

We commend to all our members the booklet that our Presbytery has prepared setting out the scriptural opposition to the Pope’s claims and creed, ‘Roman Catholicism examined by Scripture.’ We urge that it be read carefully and prayerfully.

A representative group of ministers and elders will travel to Scotland. On Wednesday night a Rally will be held in the Rutherglen Church, Glasgow.

On Thursday, when the Pope is in Edinburgh, a solemn service will be held in the historic Magdalen Chapel where John Knox held the first Reformed Presbytery in 1560. This will be followed by a public protest.

We call upon members to pray that God will enable us to highlight the contrast between the teaching of scripture and the false doctrines of the Papacy and to call all people to a personal faith in the Saviour as the Only Mediator between God and men. Our supreme aim and overriding concern is to exalt the Only King and Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev Ronald Johnstone
Moderator

Rev Ian Brown
Clerk