

Message from Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

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XVIII International Ecumenical Conference

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*To the Prior and Community of the Monastery of Bose,
and all the participants in the Eighteenth International Ecumenical Conference
on Orthodox Spirituality on Community and Solitude September 2010.*

My dear Fra Enzo, brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am very happy to send my greetings and blessings for the symposium on

Communion and Solitude at Bose, praying that it will be richly blessed by God and that its proceedings will become a significant resource in the churches for the deepening of the contemplative life.

The solitary vocation for the Christian is never a refusal, a withdrawal into isolation. Because it is first and foremost a response to the deepest possible communion with God, it is an opening to a deeper sharing in the communion that is the very life of God. The Christian solitary is precisely the person who turns away from the isolation of mere individuality to discover the personal and therefore communal and mutual life which is the source of all life. The solitary, entering into the communion of the Holy Trinity, becomes in that relationship open as never before to the needs and pains of the world; the solitary enters into deeper communion with all human beings and indeed, as many of the lives of the saints testify, into deeper communion also with the nonhuman creation.

We speak often about communion as the fundamental reality of the Church of the Triune God (to recall the title of the recent of the Anglican Orthodox Theological Commission), and this has been a vital and vitalising emphasis in all ecumenical encounters in recent decades. But to consider this afresh in relation to the solitary vocation is to be reminded that unless we are prepared to die to our habitual limited loyalties and self-oriented agendas, to silence our unconverted desires and our dependence on human approval, we shall not truly discover the heart of communion. The solitary, venturing out from the safe world of shared routine and predictable rewards, is a gift from God to the entire Church, given so that we may not forget the depth of what is asked of us as disciples of Jesus who are called to live in the Truth. A Church without the witness of solitaires is one that will be in danger of resting content with a merely human sense of togetherness rather than the transfiguring communion of God's own life shared with us in Christ's Body.

May this meeting kindle a new gratitude for this gift and a new readiness to receive it.

+ Rowan Cantuariensis

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