

# Pope's Britain visit gets some acclaim after rocky start

by [Trevor Grundy](#)

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London, 20 September (ENI)--Pope Benedict XVI completed a successful State visit to England and Scotland despite opposition from secularists and those who accuse him of intransigence on the issue of child abuse by clergy, some media reports suggest.

Prime Minister David Cameron said on 19 September just before Benedict left, "You have offered a message not just to the Catholic Church but to each and every one of us of faith and none."

Cameron noted that the Pope had delivered, "a challenge to all of us to follow our conscience, to ask not, what are my entitlements; but what are my responsibilities? To ask not what we can do for ourselves, but what we can do for others?"

The Belfast Telegraph, a daily newspaper in Northern Ireland, reported on 20 September, "Pope Benedict XVI returned to Rome last night from the United Kingdom after a four-day State visit which went much better than expected."

"This has been a success beyond our wildest dreams," a papal aide told journalists at Birmingham Airport the previous evening following the Pope's beatification of Cardinal Newman, at Cofton Park.

It was a historic service attended by more than 60 000 people, many of them waving papal flags sold by street vendors, wearing papal T-shirts after purchasing mugs and plates to commemorate the first State visit by a pope to Britain.

On 18 September thousands of people marched from Hyde Park Corner to an anti-Pope rally at Downing Street, bearing banners which said, "the Pope protects pedophile priests" and "the Pope is wrong - put a condom on". The protest was backed by the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, and other groups.

"This was a much more successful visit than the Roman Catholic hierarchy had dared to hope," editorialised the Daily Mail newspaper on 20 September. "The crowds were larger than had been forecast, if not as big as they were when the charismatic pope John Paul II came to this country 28 years ago."

The religious affairs correspondent of The Times newspaper, Ruth Gledhill wrote, "They are struck by the success of the four-day visit, which exceeded expectations in terms of the Pope's personal appeal and that of his message." She noted, "In many ways the visit could not have gone better. It has revealed an unexpected new narrowing of the historic rift between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church."

Several commentators were amazed at the enthusiasm show by teenagers towards the 83- year old Pontiff.

In her column in the Daily Mail Australian-born Amanda Platell said she is tired of listening to "the twisted opinions of noisy bigots" who include Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Stephen Fry and Christopher Hitchens, all well-known intellectuals, scientists and entertainers who are atheists and fierce opponents of Catholicism and religion.

"Thanks to the BBC and a noisy cabal of self-important atheists and Catholic haters," she said, "we have been subjected to wall-to-wall attacks on the Pope and his church. We have been bullied into silence so that the liberal elite, who really rule Britain, can impose their atheist, politically correct values upon us."

The Guardian newspaper, however, editorialised on 20 September, "Things got off on a bad footing with the [former] pope's senior adviser, Cardinal Walter Kasper seeming to suggest that to land into Heathrow was to land into a place rendered third world by multiculturalism. He was soon unpacking his suitcase, but his boss went on to link the Nazis' atrocities with their lack of faith, and encourage silly talk about atheists endangering Christmas.

It continued, "If the Pope has not done much reconciling, then neither have his militant opponents. The thousands who traipsed through London chanting 'he belongs in jail' may not see any connection between themselves and the anti-papist mobs of the past, but there is a failure to afford sincere faith the respect it is due."

Earlier, Peter Tatchell, a prominent gay and human rights activist, thanked his supporters for turning out to show their opposition to the Pope's visit. "We made a

difference," he said in a statement." We helped expose the Pope's reactionary dogmas, via news media reporting to hundreds of millions of people across the globe."