

'Catholic' confession is good for the soul - says Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop of Canterbury is encouraging Anglicans to adopt the practice of going to confession, a tradition more commonly associated with the Roman Catholic Church.



The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, left, is welcomed to the Vatican by Pope Francis. The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby is an admirer of Pope Francis Photo: AP

The Most Rev Justin Welby advised churchgoers that it could be an “enormously powerful” experience to unburden themselves to a confessor, even if it was not always a “bunch of laughs”.

His comments came as he addressed the heads of other churches – including the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England Wales, the Most Rev Vincent Nichols – about divisions between Christians.

Although Archbishop Welby comes from the evangelical wing of Anglicanism, his personal spiritual director is a Swiss Roman Catholic priest, Fr Nicolas Buttet, and he is a strong advocate of Catholic worship styles.

He spoke of being part of a wider “catholic tradition”, adding: “I’ve learnt over the last 10 years about the great sacrament of reconciliation: confession.

“It is enormously powerful and hideously painful when it’s done properly ... it’s really horrible when you go to see your confessor – I doubt you wake up in the morning and think, this is going to be a bunch of laughs.

“It’s really uncomfortable. But through it God releases forgiveness and absolution and a sense of cleansing.”

He acknowledged that he had his own personal struggles, remarking: “I’m an Archbishop; I know about the absence of humility. I struggle with it.”

Although more commonly associated with Catholicism, the Church of England has long offered a form of confession to worshippers, on request.

Anglican priests meet parishioners to hear confession face to face, often in their own home, without such trappings as confessional booths, and offer absolution for sins.

Speaking at a meeting at Lambeth Palace, organised by the group “Churches Together in England”, he also urged Christians to recognise the Church’s racist past.

“I often think about the fact that in the 1960s when Afro-Caribbean people first came to this country they were not made welcome in our churches,” he said.

“It’s the reality; it was a sin, a very bad sin.”

John Bingham - The Telegraph