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Lord Nicholas Windsor, the first male Catholic member of the royal family in four centuries visited the U.S. to promote the new Stonyhurst International Christian Heritage Centre.

Lord Nicholas Windsor was received into the Catholic Church in 2001, forfeiting his right of succession to the British throne. The youngest child of the Duke and Duchess of Kent, he is the first male blood member of the British royal family to become a Catholic since Charles II's probable conversion on his deathbed in 1685. He studied theology at Oxford University and has worked for the Refugee Council in London, the DePaul Trust for the homeless and a school for autistic children.

Active in the U.K.'s Catholic and pro-life community, he was appointed in 2011 to the Pontifical Academy for Life and is a director of the Rome-based Dignitatis Humanae Institute. In 2008, he was also awarded a fellowship at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, where he studied the work of the U.S. pro-life movement.

During the week of Sept. 30, Lord Nicholas accompanied Lord David Alton, a prominent British Catholic and prolife leader, former member of Parliament and an advocate for religious freedom, to promote an important new initiative, the International Christian Heritage Centre, which will be established at Stonyhurst College, a Jesuit institution in Britain that was founded in 1593.

Many artifacts from the Stonyhurst collection that will be on display at the Christian Heritage Centre

mark a time when English Jesuits educated the sons of English Catholics at St. Omar's College in the Pas de Calais, a French-speaking area that was controlled by the Spanish. The English boys travelled there during a long era of anti-Catholic persecution. The boys brought relics, books and other valuable items to the school to be protected and cherished while Catholic monasteries were plundered.

On Oct. 3, Lord Nicholas spoke with Register senior editor Joan Frawley Desmond about the International Heritage Centre, his conversion to Catholicism and the impact of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Britain.

Paul Johnson, the British historian, described the initiative to establish a Christian heritage center at Stonyhurst College, the Jesuit school, as a “valuable attempt to bring many precious objects into a coherent and historical narrative.”

Why is it important to remind the West of its historic ties to Christianity?

The collection really tells the story of men and women who have lived their Christian life to the full and have been prepared to suffer and even to give their lives during a time of persecution in England in the 16th and 17th centuries.

It is a story of love for the Church, love of others and love of the truth, during a time when a 1,000-year-old tradition was at risk of being uprooted. These men and women were determined that their culture would continue, though it was very nearly destroyed.

During that period, the Jesuits wanted to educate young Englishmen who couldn't receive a Catholic education in England, and they set up schools in France. The English boys were sent with items that had been preserved and saved from the officers of King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth, who sought to destroy every physical trace of Catholic culture: from the art to vestments. These Jesuit schools became a depository of sacred history, and the boys were taught to venerate the relics and the memory of the martyrs.

Many became priests and martyrs. They suffered the most appalling deaths. We cannot forget these people; they intercede for us still.

What aspects of the collection are especially important for you?

We have had the privilege to travel with the golden crucifix that St. Thomas More had in his chapel and contains a relic, the tooth of St. Thomas the Apostle. He had it on his desk when he was writing his extraordinary spiritual works. He probably took it with him to the Tower [of London].

We have taken it to a number of Masses here in Washington, D.C. When we visited The Catholic University of America, 150 students lined up to venerate the cross.

The curator of the collection is a devotee of Archbishop Oscar Romero, and she brought a piece of the blood-stained vestment he wore when he was gunned down.

We brought a Latin poetry book used by John Carroll [the first Catholic bishop in the United States], who signed the book in 1751 and passed it on to Charles Carroll, the signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Part of the Jesuit charism of Ignatius was to bring the faith alive by using artifacts and images, music, drama and literature. Now, these relics and artifacts can be used to prepare and form young boys and girls in the faith.

We often hear of the “special relationship” between Britain and the United States on foreign-policy matters, but this initiative for the Christian Heritage Centre also reminds us that the experience of English Catholics also helped to inspire our commitment to religious liberty.

During our visit, we have met many people who revered the memory of Thomas More and Edmund Campion. Religious freedom and the rights of conscience are on people’s minds because of the new health-care legislation.

In Britain, one hears stories of those criticized for presenting moral teachings of the Church. We need to remember that Thomas More and Edmund Campion stood firm.

Was the Christian faith an important part of your own upbringing?

I was fortunate that every Sunday we went to a traditional Anglican service. Once a month, there would be a communion service. It was an old-fashioned way of being an Anglican.

When I went to university, I took my faith seriously and studied theology. I encountered high Anglicanism that had trappings of traditional Catholic liturgy. It was hugely appealing to me. I was also influenced by John Henry Newman.

What was the tipping point that sent you to the Catholic Church?

The tipping point was my first encounter with the preaching of John Paul II. When it was first possible to receive EWTN, I heard him for the first time and saw him engaging with young people, and I became one of them.

He was inviting people to an adventure I had never contemplated before. It opened a set of doors to a much richer, deeper, more challenging way of living the Christian life. I listened to him and read what he wrote. I picked up the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

I am grateful as a former child of the Anglican Church, but it hadn't stood firm on many moral questions, and I was persuaded by the moral positions of the Catholic Church as well.

What has been the reaction in Britain to your decision to enter the Catholic Church?

I was surprised that there was no overtly negative response. It was overwhelmingly positive, to the extent that I received any acknowledgement.

Some said they were glad [that converting to Catholicism] was possible for someone who revered our queen, as I do, and was utterly loyal. [Thus], others could also think it was acceptable, and it wouldn't make anyone less British or less patriotic.

The thing to say about English culture now is that what matters [is not so much what Catholics believe, but] what they do. Their interactions in politics can stir people negatively, and that is not welcome.

Were you present when Pope Benedict XVI traveled to the United Kingdom in 2010 and spoke before the British Parliament at Westminster about the example of St. Thomas More and the “proper place of religious belief within the political process”?

We were able to meet Benedict when he arrived in Britain and came first to Scotland, where he met the queen at her official palace in Edinburgh, Holyrood Palace. It had been a monastery. The ruin is still

there, and the Pope met the queen close by.

I heard his beautiful speech at Westminster Hall, where he spoke of the need to find sure ethical foundations for legislative decisions that men and women had to make. He made reference to [William] Wilberforce [who led the British movement to abolish slavery] and how previous politicians had been able to make good and just laws.

Benedict said, "If the moral principles underpinning the democratic process [were] ... nothing more solid than social consensus," then the democratic process becomes increasingly fragile. Do you see any long-term impact of the Pope's visit?

For the Catholics, it did make a difference. He inspired us. For the country at large, he came and spoke with charm, delicacy, warmth and goodness, in a way that was unexpected. He didn't come to hector or wag his finger. He spoke beautifully and positively about what the faith has to offer a troubled world and for people who have great needs and longings for God. Those sections of the media that were prepared to jump on him were instead disarmed.

You have been active in the pro-life movement and are a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life. When did you become active, and why?

What steered me to think about it seriously was John Paul, and not just his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life). He also talked about the need to value human life as something beyond price.

As I explored the question and pondered it deeply, I became disturbed and upset by the question of abortion. I gave a speech in Vienna at a conference that was published in *First Things*. I was invited to more [events like that] and was glad to encourage young people.

John Paul had seen human life trampled on so thoroughly, whether during the Second World War in Poland or after the war. He had seen vicious ideologies, whether Nazism or Communism, utterly at odds with Christian values.

His whole personality was developed to promote those values: of freedom, of human dignity. He came across as utterly authentic, and his firm manner was so compelling

You also served as a fellow for the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington. Can you tell me about that experience and what you learned about pro-life work and debate in America?

My wife and I came a year or so after we were married and spent six months in Washington, D.C. I had the privilege of being a visiting fellow with George Weigel, with the goal of researching the

pro-life movement in the States, to talk to the actors and different institutions and to see how they developed their approach and engaged people. It was a wonderful learning experience. The pro-life movement is not as deep and wide in the United Kingdom as it is here.

It was energizing and gave me a great sense of solidarity. I met people who do this with love and have developed beautiful, cogent arguments in favor of women and men making wise choices and not terrible destructive choices.

I came away with a head full of ideas. Adapting what I learned back in England is challenging, but that has more to do with the political process.

Here, you have laws that allow things to be ameliorated at the local level. The United Kingdom is more centralized, and our legal situation is different. We don't have a constitutional finding on this subject. It is purely a matter of legislative redress.

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Joan Frawley Desmond - REGISTER