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SUBJECT: AMIDST CONTROVERSY, ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY MEETS POPE

REF: VATICAN 113

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CLASSIFIED BY: Rafael Foley, Pol Chief. REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: During his recent visit to Rome and meeting with the Pope -- planned before the Pope urged disaffected Anglicans to convert to Catholicism-- Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams challenged the position of the Catholic Church on ordination of women and made it clear that the Vatican should have consulted with him before reaching out to the Anglican community. Although Williams' visit to Rome was cast as positive and reinforcing of ecumenical dialogue, it's clear the wounds from this controversy will affect that dialogue negatively (at least for now) and are likely to cast a pall over the Pope's planned state visit to England in 2010. End summary

Official and Public Statements Focus on Positive

¶2. (SBU) The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, met with Pope Benedict XVI on November 21. The meeting was planned before the Vatican released its new apostolic constitution that facilitates the conversion of Anglicans to

Catholicism. Described as "cordial" by Vatican officials in an official statement, the Holy See said "The discussions also focused on recent events affecting relations between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion, reiterating the shared will to continue and to consolidate the ecumenical relationship between Catholics and Anglicans." Notwithstanding this upbeat Vatican characterization of the meeting, Williams used it to draw clear lines between Anglican and Catholic core beliefs. He presented the Pope with a copy of a lecture he delivered in Rome on November 19, in which he challenged the Vatican's position on the ordination of women, the authority of the papacy, and the role and relation of local churches to a centralized governing structure.

¶3. (U) Speaking with Vatican Radio shortly after the meeting, Williams stressed his prior good relations with the Pope and downplayed the importance of the Vatican's new procedure for receiving Anglicans into the Catholic Church. However, he did express misgivings about how the new procedure was announced. In order to prevent negative fall-out during the Pope's planned 2010 state visit to England, Williams recommended in the interview that the Pope tread carefully while in England when discussing the late Cardinal Henry Newman (1801-1890). (Note: Newman, a convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism, may be recognized as a "blessed" model for Catholics -- beatified -- during the Pope's visit.) Williams said he had asked the Pope to speak about Newman as a great British intellectual, and not just as a convert.

~But Private Discussions Reveal a Deeper Rift

¶4. (S) Archbishop Williams was the guest of honor at a dinner on Nov. 20 hosted by the British Ambassador to the Holy See, Francis Campbell, for senior Vatican officials. Campbell told the Ambassador that the tone of the conversation was respectful but at times awkward. Campbell (protect) believes the Vatican's move shifted the goal of the Catholic-Anglican ecumenical dialogue from true unity to mere cooperation. He further noted that some Vatican officials themselves believe that Williams should have been consulted --instead of simply told-- about the apostolic constitution. (Comment: Campbell was probably referring to Cardinal Kasper, who runs the Council for Christian Unity. End Comment)

¶5. (S) In a subsequent conversation with DCM after Williams' departure, Campbell (strictly protect) said Anglican-Vatican relations were facing their worst crisis in 150 years as a result of the Pope's decision. The Vatican decision seems to have been aimed primarily at Anglicans in the U.S. and Australia, with little thought given to how it would affect the center of Anglicanism, England, or the Archbishop of Canterbury. Benedict XVI, Campbell said, had put Williams in an impossible situation. If Williams reacted more forcefully, he would destroy decades of work on ecumenical dialogue; by not reacting

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more harshly, he has lost support among angry Anglicans. The crisis is also worrisome for England's small, mostly Irish-origin, Catholic minority, Campbell said. There is still latent anti-Catholicism in some parts of England and it may not take much to set it off. The outcome could be discrimination or in isolated cases, even violence, against this minority. As for the Pope's visit next year to England, Campbell said he now expected a chilly reception, especially from the Royal family - which was not a great supporter of ecumenical dialogue even before the crisis.

Comment

¶6. (S) Williams' previously planned meeting with the Pope unquestionably came at an awkward time, but was also important that it happen in order to start healing the damage caused by the Vatican's outreach to Anglicans. The visit also gave Williams an opportunity to recover some lost stature by challenging the Catholic Church during his visit. As reported previously (reftel), the Vatican decision to go after disaffected Anglicans undercut Cardinal Kasper, and it now seems the decision may cast a pall on the Pope's visit to England next year. In the end, some may wonder whether the damage to inter-Christian relations was worth it - especially since the number of disaffected Anglicans that will convert is likely to be a trickle rather than a wave. End comment. DIAZ