

Q & A: James Roberts

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 10, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

We finish our week of interviews with editors of the British Catholic weekly *The Tablet* [1] here at Q & A with the comments of James Roberts, assistant editor.

The question: What is the most important thing Pope Benedict must say or do when he is in the UK next week?

James Roberts: The Pope has one job, ultimately, and that is to save souls by spreading the Gospel message. On a pastoral visit, it is in order to focus primarily on strengthening the faith of the flock, but a state visit is to the whole country, and the focus must be different. Large swathes of Britain have forgotten the Gospel message, or have never heard it. The Pope's visit must therefore be a missionary one.

However, this raises the question of how does he persuasively and credibly talk of the Christian road to salvation, when the Catholic Church is stigmatised in the popular mind as arrogant and uncaring, because of its teaching on contraception and sexuality, and as sinful and hypocritical, because of its association with child sexual abuse, and the deliberate cover-up of its criminality in this area.

The answer is that the Pope must show how a Christian and a Catholic lives out his or her faith in these circumstances. The truth sets us free, and is a friend of reason, so he must acknowledge the truth about sex abuse. Then, in the areas of sexuality, he must defend the Church's positions in a rational way that other rational, non-religious people can understand. Undefined teaching is non-rational or irrational.

But beyond this, he must address the charges of arrogance so easily levelled against the Church. He must demonstrate what humility is like to a society that finds the concept increasingly difficult to understand. He can do this in his words, his demeanour and his dress. To a society that puts its faith in the ego, he must show what it is like to live with the Lord, not one's ego, as one's shepherd.

Stories in this series on the papal visit to Scotland and England:

- [Hijacking or setting him free, Benedict loves Newman](#) [2], by John L. Allen, Jr.
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- [Analysis: Benedict's in a box in talking about the crisis](#) [7], by John L. Allen, Jr.
- [Pope apologizes for 'unspeakable crimes' of sex abuse](#) [8], by John L. Allen, Jr.
- [Joint statement on meeting between Pope and Archbishop of Canterbury](#) [9]
- [Benedict in Britain: We get it, we've got it, let's share it](#) [10], by John L. Allen, Jr.
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- [Full text of pope's comments on the crisis](#) [12], by John L. Allen, Jr.
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- [Newman: the 'sense' and 'consent' of the faithful](#) [20], a viewpoint by Robert McClory

All this week in his Distinctly Catholic blog, Michael Sean Winters is interviewing a variety of Newman scholars:

- [Fr. Joseph Komonchak, taught ecclesiology at Catholic University, wrote his dissertation on Newman](#) [21]
- [Christopher Pramuk, Assistant professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati](#) [22]
- [Ian Ker, Professor at Oxford University and author of a Newman biography](#) [23]
- [The Very Reverend Richard Duffield, the Provost of the Birmingham Oratory](#) [24]
- [Archbishop Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and Primate of England](#) [25]

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- [Letters between Newman and the Rev. Charles Kingsley](#) [27]
- [James Roberts, assistant editor of the British Catholic weekly The Tablet](#) [28]
- [Christopher Lamb, news editor of the British Catholic weekly The Tablet](#) [29]
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