

Her Majesty The Queen's Address to the General Assembly 2002

Right Reverend Moderator, I congratulate you warmly on your appointment as Moderator and wish you every success over the next year in this important office of the Church. I am sure that the General Assembly will benefit from your years of service to this body as well as from your long and valued experience as a parish minister.

Right Reverend and Right Honourable, you may be seated.

It gives me great pleasure to be attending the General Assembly in this Golden Jubilee year and it brings back memories of my visit here 25 years ago. On that occasion I repeated my solemn pledge made in 1952 to preserve and uphold the rights and privileges of the Church of Scotland. I make that pledge again today. In doing so, I acknowledge with gratitude to almighty God the Church's steadfast witness to the Christian faith throughout the years of my reign. I follow your proceedings with great interest every year through the Lord High Commissioner's Report and I am particularly glad to be able to be here with you now at the opening session this year.

My last visit to this building in 1999 was on the historic occasion of the opening of the Scottish Parliament. I expressed then and reaffirm now my profound affection for Scotland and the importance of the Scottish dimension to my life and the lives of my family.

My visit here today affords me an opportunity to thank the people of Scotland for their support after the deaths of my mother and my sister. I have been so touched by the kindness shown by so many of you over these recent months. I greatly value my family's long connection with the Church of Scotland. If some of my predecessors have had their differences with the Church, others have held it in high regard. I think especially of my great-great Grandmother Queen Victoria who was devoted to the Kirk not least because of its straight-forward, practical Christianity. This characteristic of the Church of Scotland has also had a special influence on my own faith. As we go about our lives we all search for ways of translating the timeless values of Christ into everyday guidance for the challenges we face. I believe that Christ's example of tolerance and compassion gives us all, in our different circumstances, that sense of direction we so often need in today's changing world.

Your tradition of practical Christianity and the importance you attach to the teachings of tolerance and compassion are evident in your present priorities. I am impressed by the activities of your Board of Social Responsibility, the largest provider of social services in Scotland apart from the public agencies and especially by its work with the elderly and those with alcohol and drug dependency and I appreciate that there is increasing pressure of demand as you pursue this vitally important work.

A broad and direct concern with social justice has long been a characteristic of Scotland as a whole. It is reflected in the deliberations of this Assembly and in your determination to live out your calling to be a national Church serving all the people of Scotland.

But it is not just in the Church of Scotland that this commitment is found. It inspires and motivates Christians of all denominations and other faith communities here. Its expression is to be seen in the strength and vigour of many voluntary and community organisations such as those I met in Glasgow two days' ago.

The Church recognises that it cannot stand still and continues to make valuable contributions to the fastest changing spheres of national life. In debates on the implications of science and technology it has developed a particular expertise, most recently making high profile contributions on ethical issues such as genetic engineering. The Church has also been active in drawing attention to the

human misery surrounding the global HIV/AIDS epidemic and in working with partner churches, particularly in Africa, to alleviate suffering and poverty.

Scottish Christians are increasingly involved abroad in speaking up for the innocent and voiceless brought up in conflict and suffering. Instability in the world and in particular in the Middle East and the Asian sub-continent brings us all together in the need to work and pray for peace. I know that this will be an important item of business for the Assembly this week.

In the face of these and other challenging issues which the Church faces as it looks to the future, may your faith and courage be strengthened by your deliberations during the week ahead.

As I am unable to be with you after this morning I have appointed Viscount Younger of Leckie as Lord High Commissioner who is well known to you in that office. I am confident that he will discharge his responsibilities with his customary wisdom and diligence.

May I again express my pleasure at being with you and I pray that God's blessing may attend your discussions.