ANDREW MARR:
Good morning to you, Cardinal.

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
You have been speaking out about issues like inequality and poverty. Is this a sign of the change in the church under the new Pope – a church speaking less about sort of matters of personal sexual morality and more about big social issues?

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
Well certainly Pope Francis, with his experience from South America, is very committed to saying that the unfolding of the Christian faith means having a particular eye for those who are poor. He has a very striking phrase: “If you want to listen to God, you will hear the cry of the poor”, and my comments were simply to reflect what priests on the ground are telling me up and down the country and certainly in the city.
**ANDREW MARR:**

Well I was wondering about that because ministers have attacked you for what you said about the welfare state, saying that they are spending more and more on the welfare state – the bills are going up – and so that any notion that the safety net has been shredded can’t be true and that you’re well-meaning but you were naïve about that.

**CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:**

Well it would be nice if they commented on what I actually said, which was to say that the evidence is there that people are living in destitution. Now that’s a fact. I’m not naïve to state facts. But it’s accurate and what’s been interesting to me is that since I made those remarks ten days ago different voices have joined in and said yeah that’s right. In fact even before I said that, there was a Committee of the House of Commons made a report on 28th January making some very similar points.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Yes.

**CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:**

So I’m quite glad now, for example, that there is an independent committee that’s going to be looking into the incidences of poverty chaired by the Bishop of Truro and I think that’s a very good thing.

**ANDREW MARR:**

But what about the comments by Iain Duncan Smith, for instance, who said that it’s not moral, it’s not Christian for quite poor taxpayers to be contributing to welfare bills which can be sort of fifty, sixty, seventy thousand pounds (or could be before) for people who weren’t working and that you were trapping people into a sort of cycle of deprivation?

**CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:**

I understand the cycle of deprivation, I’ve seen it, and at no point did I comment that the government policy in itself was wrong. What I said was that there are clear
implications of it, as indeed you said yourself, which to see real, before our eyes, knocking on your door a family in destitution in a country as wealthy as this is a disgrace. That should not happen.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And so when ministers say you don’t really know what’s going on, your answer is “I do because priests from inner city parishes around the country come to me and tell me”?

**CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:**
Yes. You know sometimes it’s suggest that people have recourse to food banks because food then becomes a commodity they can sell on. Well when I sit and listen to my priests and they say when they put through the food bank three days food in front of a woman with her children and she bursts into tears because she hasn’t eaten for three days, that’s not a fantasy. That’s human lives. And I think one of the great gifts of Pope Francis is to say to us, mainly through his gestures, we must protect the dignity of people. Even if they’ve got a disformed face or even if they’re very limited in their physical mobility, their essential human dignity is what we must uphold and protect.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Do you think, therefore, there are aspects of our current welfare system that are immoral?

**CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:**
I think the current welfare system does need reform and I don’t disagree with the principles on which the Government is working, but it cannot be at the cost of casting people into destitution. I don’t believe that is motivational and in fact some of the priests who are right there on the ground say it comes across as punitive. Now I do think the sources and the reasons for that kind of poverty are complex and we have to look at them and indeed I’m going to get some of our priests together and say tell me those stories and I know we can have a conversation with government officials on that line.
ANDREW MARR:
The last time we talked, you were an Archbishop. Now you’re a Cardinal. What is the difference in terms of your authority in the church and what you can do?

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
In this country, none at all in terms of church life. People seem to pay a bit more attention to what I say and I get a lot more tasks and jobs to contribute to the work of the Holy see in Rome. So I’m going to be …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You have some wonderful red gear which you’re not wearing this morning …

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
No, I’m sorry about that.

ANDREW MARR:
… and that represents your willingness to die for the church. Is that right?

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
That’s true. That’s the imagery that lies behind that choice of colour. It’s also the colour of the cardinal bird; and one of the things about the cardinal bird, it has a greater range of melodies and songs than practically any other bird anywhere. So I’m looking forward to having that on tweet of the day.

ANDREW MARR:
It’s also of course the colour of Liverpool FC and I know that you have been on the terraces of Anfield in your time, many times.

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
Yes, that’s right.

ANDREW MARR:
In fact that is where I think you had your calling? You felt a call?
CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
Well it wasn’t quite like that. It was where I wanted to resist this sense of vocation more than anywhere else. I remember quite vividly saying – it was at the Anfield road end – I was saying, “God, why can’t you just leave me alone? Why can’t I just be one of this crowd? I’d be much happier.” But he wouldn’t and he wouldn’t go away. But I would add I don’t think I’ve had a really depressed day ever since I was ordained a priest. It’s a wonderful way of life.

ANDREW MARR:
And when are we going to see, do you think, Pope Francis coming to this country?

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
Well he’s not a young man. I think he’s got his agenda very clearly in his mind. I’m not sure that being an international traveler is part of it. He’s pacing himself very clearly. His next visit will be to the Holy land, to the Middle East, and that is obviously strategically very, very important.

ANDREW MARR:
Important, yes.

CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS:
So I would imagine he’ll pick his trips with great care. But he’s a man of steel as well as great humanity.

ANDREW MARR:
Well it’s been lovely talking to you. Thank you very much indeed for joining us.

INTERVIEW ENDS