



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO MR FRANCIS MARTIN-XAVIER CAMPBELL
AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND TO THE HOLY SEE**

Friday 23 December 2005

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Holy See. In thanking you for the greetings that you bring from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her Government, I ask you in return to convey my respectful good wishes and prayers for the peace and prosperity of the realm.

The Holy See greatly values its formal links with your country, restored in 1914 and raised to full diplomatic status in 1982. These relations have made possible a significant degree of cooperation in the service of peace and justice, especially in the developing world, where the United Kingdom has played a leading role in international efforts to combat poverty and disease. Through such initiatives as the International Finance Facility, Her Majesty's Government has taken concrete steps to promote the timely realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Especially in Africa, many have drawn comfort from the aid resolutions taken at July's Gleneagles summit, when the G8 Group met under the presidency of Great Britain. I pray that this effective solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters will be maintained and deepened in years to come. In the words of my venerable predecessor, Pope Gregory the Great, "When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice" (*Pastoral Rule*, 3:21, quoted in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 184). As you have observed, Mr Ambassador, your country is no stranger to the strife caused by the sad divisions within Christianity. The wounds resulting from more than four centuries of separation cannot be healed without determined efforts, perseverance, and above all, prayer. I

give thanks to God for the progress that has been made in recent years in the various ecumenical dialogues, and I encourage all those involved in this work never to rest content with partial solutions but to keep firmly in view the goal of full visible unity among Christians which accords with the Lord's will for his Church. Ecumenism is not simply an internal matter of concern to Christian communities; it is an imperative of charity which expresses God's love for all humanity and his plan to unite all peoples in Christ (cf. *Ut Unum Sint*, 99). It offers a "radiant sign of hope and consolation for all mankind" (*Letter of Pope Paul VI to Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I*, 13 January 1970), and as such has an essential part to play in overcoming divisions between communities and nations.

In this regard, I am pleased to note the significant progress that has been made over the last few years towards achieving peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Local Churches and ecclesial communities have worked hard to overcome historic differences between sections of the population, and among the most visible signs of the growth in mutual trust is the recent decommissioning of weapons by the Irish Republican Army. This would not have been possible without immense diplomatic and political efforts to achieve a just solution to that long-standing conflict, and it brings great credit upon all who were involved.

Sadly, in the wake of the bombings that took place in London last July, your country still has to cope with acts of indiscriminate violence directed against members of the public. I wish to assure you of the continuing support of the Church as you seek solutions to the underlying tensions that give rise to such atrocities. The Catholic population in Great Britain is already marked by a high degree of ethnic diversity and is eager to play its part in furthering reconciliation and harmony between the various racial groups present in your country. I know that Her Majesty's Government recognizes the importance of inter-religious dialogue, and I welcome the openness that the Government has shown towards involving faith communities in the process of integrating the increasingly disparate elements that make up British society.

Tolerance and respect for difference are values that the United Kingdom has done much to promote both within its borders and beyond, and they derive from an appreciation of the innate dignity and the inalienable rights of every human person. As such they are deeply rooted in the Christian faith. You have spoken of the importance for the United Kingdom of remaining faithful to Europe's rich traditions, and such fidelity naturally involves a profound respect for the truth that God has revealed concerning the human person. It requires us to recognize and protect the sanctity of life from the first moment of conception until natural death. It requires us to acknowledge the indispensable role of stable marriage and family life for the good of society. It obliges us to consider carefully the ethical implications of scientific and technological progress, particularly in the field of medical research and genetic engineering. Above all, it directs us towards a proper understanding of human freedom which can never be realized independently of God but only in cooperation with his loving plan for humanity (cf. *Homily for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception*, 8 December 2005). Tolerance and respect for difference, if they are truly

to benefit society, need to be built upon the rock of an authentic understanding of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and called to a share in his divine life.

Your Excellency, I am confident that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will serve to strengthen the good relations that exist between the United Kingdom and the Holy See. In offering you my best wishes for the years ahead, I assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always ready to provide help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon Your Excellency and all the people of Great Britain and Northern Ireland I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

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