



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF IRELAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 7 September 2001

Mr Ambassador,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to Castelgandolfo this morning and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ireland to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you have conveyed on behalf of President Mary McAleese, and I gladly reciprocate with good wishes and the assurance of my goodwill and prayers for her and the people of Ireland.

You have mentioned the Great Jubilee celebrations which took place last year to mark the Two Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of Christ. The Jubilee was an occasion for the Church throughout the world to be renewed in her commitment to the Gospel and in her service to humanity. Many Irish people came on pilgrimage to Rome in the course of the Jubilee year, giving expression to the bonds of union with the Successor of Peter which have characterized the Church in Ireland since the time of Saint Patrick and even before him. It is not possible to think of Ireland without recalling its monastic tradition, its love of learning and the missionary zeal which led many Irish men and women down the centuries to become *peregrini pro Christo* throughout the world.

The Christian foundations of Europe owe much to the vision and labours of great Irish saints such as Columba, Columbanus, Gall and Killian. In later more troubled times Irish men and women suffered discrimination, persecution and even martyrdom for their tenacious fidelity to the faith of their ancestors. This heritage has deeply marked the character and culture of the Irish people, who have a special sensitivity to the sufferings of other peoples, and have been outstanding in generosity and solidarity towards them. Even now Irish men and women are in the forefront of the

Church's work of evangelization and service in all parts of the world, and not infrequently they bear the supreme witness to their faith and commitment, as very recently in the case of Father Rufus Halley, an Irish Columban, in the Philippines.

Recent years have brought rapid social and economic change, leading to many positive developments, but also to new and sometimes destabilizing demands on individuals and society. In particular, as you have observed, there is a need to discern those trends and changes which encourage genuine progress while safeguarding the values on which your nation is built. A country is more than the sum of its possessions and powers; it is the cradle and home of a people's soul and spirit.

Genuine development is possible only on the basis of a correct concept of the human person and of what constitutes the true good and well-being of a people. The choices made in the economic and social domain reveal a given culture's overall understanding of life. A complete picture of the human person respects all the dimensions of his being and subordinates the material and instinctive dimensions to the interior, rational and spiritual ones.

There is need for considerable educational and cultural effort to ensure that people, apart from developing new and advanced technological skills and expertise, are also trained to make responsible use of their new-found power of choice in order to distinguish between the valuable and the ephemeral. For this reason the primacy of *being* over *having*, which involves the quest for the true, the good and the beautiful, must always be considered central to a culture if people are to live genuinely happy and fulfilled lives. The inherited wisdom and resources of Ireland's heritage and tradition, as well as the gifts and talents of its citizens, should continue to provide a sure guide and inspiration for social progress.

The family plays an essential role in helping its members to grow to full human maturity, and therefore to play a responsible role in society. It is in the family that people receive the first formative ideas about truth, goodness, love, commitment, and service of others. Today, however, the family is increasingly under severe pressure from a complicated interplay of forces which tend to subordinate the transcendent value of life to other immediate interests or even to personal convenience. When the Church defends the right to life of every innocent person—from conception to natural death—as one of the pillars on which every civil society stands, she is simply promoting a *human State*, a community in fundamental agreement with human nature. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other, acts to the contrary by allowing or employing practices which devalue and violate human life, especially where it is most vulnerable (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 101). Only where there is unconditional respect for the right to life can other inalienable rights be safeguarded. And only on such an objective basis can true democracy and the common good be built.

Mr Ambassador, you have mentioned Ireland's awareness of its responsibilities and its increased role within the international community. The Holy See, as you know, is deeply concerned at the emergence and growth of old and new tensions in many parts of the world. One of the difficulties which has grown more acute in recent times as a result also of the increasing mobility of peoples is that of racial discrimination, the theme of the United Nations Conference which concludes today in Durban, South Africa. The worrying resurgence of aggressive forms of nationalism and racism are serious threats to human dignity and undermine social coexistence, peace and harmony. The Church reprobates as contrary to God's will all discrimination or harassment of people due to race, colour, condition of life or religion (cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 5). A culture of mutual openness and acceptance needs to be fostered; this calls for suitable educational initiatives and the legal protection of the fundamental rights of all. Ireland's tradition of warm hospitality cannot fail precisely when the world stands in need of attitudes of fairness, justice and solidarity with those in need.

I often recall my visit to Ireland in 1979 where I experienced at first hand the kindness, hospitality and deep religious faith of your people. While there, I asked that those involved in violence in Northern Ireland would renounce the use of arms and embrace the path of dialogue and peace. Much progress has been made in recent times in this regard and we must hope that a new spirit of enlightened commitment to the common good will indeed take hold at every level. Present difficulties are a reminder that peace is a fragile reality calling for continued goodwill and the implementation of the practical measures required for a just and harmonious society.

Mr Ambassador, as you begin your duties as your country's Representative to the Holy See I assure you of my prayers for the success of your mission. You may be certain that the various departments of the Roman Curia will be only too willing to assist you in this task. I ask Almighty God's abundant blessings upon you and upon the beloved people of Ireland.

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