



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr PATRICK J. HILLERY
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND***

Thursday, 20 April 1989

A Uachtaráin uasal, (*Dear Mr President*)

Céad míle fáilte romhat chuig an Vaticanáin. (*A hundred thousand welcomes to the Vatican*).

1. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here today and through you to extend my warmest greetings to the beloved people of Ireland who cannot but hold a special place of affection in the heart of the Successor of the Apostle Peter. In God's design for his Church, Saint Patrick's preaching to the Irish stands out as one of the most extraordinary illustrations of the Gospel parable of the sower who went out to sow the seed. The seed fell on good soil and brought forth an hundredfold (Cfr. *Matth.* 13, 8). The singular contribution which Ireland has made to the evangelization of Europe and the development of European culture, as well as to the Church's worldwide missionary expansion in more recent times, has forged an unbreakable bond between your country and the Holy See.

During my memorable visit in 1979, I experienced for myself the depth of this "union of charity between Ireland and the Holy Roman Church" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia ad "Phoenix Park" habita*, 1, die 29 sept. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 [1979] 413). For all this, I considered my visit "a great debt to Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of history and the author of our salvation" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia ad "Phoenix Park" habita*, 1, die 29 sept. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 [1979] 413). Our meeting today is a solemn recognition and joyful celebration of that genuine friendship which, on my part, embraces all the people of Ireland, including those who follow other religious traditions.

2. Modern Ireland was founded on a vision of a society capable of responding to the deepest aspirations of its people and ensuring respect for the dignity and rights of all its citizens. That

vision is linked to a prolonged yearning for the effective realization of the profound human and Christian values that have never ceased to resound in the minds and hearts of the Irish people. Ireland can certainly be proud of the progress made. Difficulties – even very serious ones – are not lacking, but she is, on the whole, a warm and loving society, secure in the rule of law and rooted in the highest ideals of justice, freedom and peace.

In the international forum, Ireland holds a place of particular relevance. Millions of people in other parts of the world trace their origins to that land, and large numbers of Irish men and women of the Church, as well as volunteers in social and development work, serve in almost every corner of the earth. Equally notable is the fact that your country has also sought to be a committed and active partner in such organizations as the United Nations and the European Community.

You yourself as Minister of Foreign Affairs negotiated Ireland's entry into the European Community and served as Vice-President of the Commission of the European Communities with special responsibility for Social Affairs. I have noted from *The Jean Monet Lecture* which you delivered at the European University Institute last year the depth of your personal commitment to the ideal of a common European community which, at the same time, takes into account the richness of its different cultures and the uniqueness of each people's history. Ireland's voice in Europe and the world is particularly suited to be a voice of friendship, good will and peace. Ireland can contribute the wisdom of a calm and impartial reflection on the lessons of history, a reflection made in the context of the profound Christian humanism which is its most genuine ethos.

3. As Your Excellency knows, in Saint Peter's Basilica there is a chapel dedicated to the great Irishman, Saint Columbanus. The mosaic behind the altar shows Columbanus and his followers as "*peregrinantes pro Christo*", ambassadors and heralds of Christ's Gospel. How often has that role been repeated by Irish men and women who have been and continue to be witnesses of Christ in every continent! The mosaic bears this inscription: "*Si tollis libertatem tollis dignitatem*" – if you take away man's freedom you destroy his dignity (*Epist. n. 4 ad Attela*, in S. Columbanus opera, Dublin 1957, p. 34). The phrase might have been uttered, not by Columbanus in the early seventh century, but by one of your later patriots or by someone today who looks upon the world and perceives with regret and sadness that not all people are truly free. Alongside the old oppressions, modern societies are exposed to new forms of subjugation. These new bondages are particularly destructive of human dignity.

It was with this in mind, during my visit to Ireland ten years ago, that I spoke of a confrontation with values and trends alien to Irish society. Developed societies too often experience that the most sacred principles "are being hollowed out by false pretences" (Cfr. Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Homilia ad "Phoenix Park" habita*, 3, die 29 sept. 1979: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, II, 2 [1979] 415). Selfishness takes the place of moral courage and solidarity. Self-worth is then measured in terms of having, not being. As a consequence, a climate is formed of big and small injustices and myriad forms of violence. What is accepted as true freedom is in reality only a new form of slavery.

In such circumstances, the words enshrined in Saint Columbanus' chapel echo loud in all their wisdom and warning: if true freedom – the willingness to choose good and truth – is lost, then the dignity, value and inalienable rights of the person are threatened. Ireland has the spiritual and human resources to pursue the path of authentic development which would respect and promote all the dimensions of the human person, in the exercise of a just and generous solidarity, especially towards the weakest members of society. I know, Your Excellency, that you share this concern and this conviction. I assure you that my frequent prayer for your fellow citizens reflects the confidence that Ireland will succeed in meeting this challenge.

4. As a country, Ireland stands firmly on the side of peace, and the Irish people truly cherish peace in their hearts. Yet the life of the whole island is convulsed by the deadly climate of intimidation and violence which has caused so much suffering to both communities in Northern Ireland during the past twenty years. Violence of the kind being perpetrated in Northern Ireland offers no solution to the real problems of society. It is not the method democratically chosen by the people of either side. It offers no truth that can attract and convince the minds and hearts of ordinary people. Its one argument is the terror and the destruction it produces.

Only a genuine willingness to engage in dialogue and courageous gestures of reconciliation goes to the heart of the underlying causes of the present complex situation of conflict. As I wrote in this year's Message for the World Day of Peace, where there exist side by side communities marked by different ethnic origins, cultural traditions or religious beliefs, each has a right to its collective identity which must be safeguarded and promoted (Cfr. *Eiusdem Nuntius ob diem ad pacem fovendam dicatum pro a. D. 1989*, 3, die 8 dec. 1988: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI, 3 [1988] 1788). At the same time all must conscientiously judge the correctness of their claims in the light of the truth, which includes historical developments and the present reality. Not to do so would involve the risk of remaining prisoners of the past without prospects for the future (Cfr. *ibid.* 11: *l. c.*, p. 1788).

Yet the future is already there before us. It exists in the young people of Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, who desperately want to inherit a land at peace and a society built on justice and respect for all its members. When they see how the youth of Europe react positively to growing unity between peoples of different countries and different backgrounds, do they not demand the same chance for themselves? Who can claim the right to deny them their future and their freedom?

A moral imperative lies on all parties involved to arrive at a political consensus that will respect the legitimate rights and aspirations of all the people of Northern Ireland. Signs of hope are not lacking, and we shall pray and be confident that a process guided by reason and mutual acceptance will not be long in bringing an end to bloodshed and the secure advent of a just reconciliation and peaceful reconstruction. May God sustain the perseverance and courage of those who work realistically and with fraternal love for the prompt arrival of that day.

5. Mr President, the Ireland I remember most vividly is reflected in a sequence of charming images: in the natural beauty of the countryside and the friendliness of her people; in the joyful and devout participation of an immense multitude in the Mass I celebrated in the Phoenix Park; in the noble enthusiasm of a sea of young people at Galway; in my meeting with the leaders of the other Churches and communities, as well as in so many other personal and collective encounters. And in the background lingers the image of the monastic ruins of Clonmacnois. The ruins speak of Ireland's age-old fidelity to Christ. The faces of the people spoke clearly of Ireland's fidelity to Christ today and of the confidence with which Ireland faces its future.

My personal happiness at your visit is therefore deep and full of appreciation. Furthermore, we are celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of cordial and fruitful diplomatic relations between Ireland and the Holy See. May Almighty God continue to bless this relationship, for his glory, for the good of the Church and for the peace and well-being of the Irish people.

I thank you, Mr President, for having wished to represent your country here today. I gladly invoke God's loving protection upon you and your fellow-citizens.

Dia agus Muire libh. (*God and Mary be with you*).

Beannacht Dé is Muire libh go léir. (*The blessings of God and Mary be with you all*)

*AAS 81 (1989) p. 1144-1148.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XII, 1 pp. 873-877.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1989 pp. 265-267.

L'Osservatore Romano 21.4.1989 pp.1, 5.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 18 pp. 1, 2.

© Copyright 1989 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana