



The Holy See

***LETTER OF PAUL VI
TO CARDINAL WILLIAM CONWAY
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF SAINT PATRICK***

The Feast of the Apostle of Ireland, Saint Patrick, gives us the occasion to write to you, Venerable Brother, and, through you, to greet the beloved Irish people.

Saint Patrick himself marvelled at the workings of grace on your island. In our day, we give thanks to God for the continued vitality and vigour of the Church in Ireland. We see among vast numbers of your people an impressive fidelity to the duties of religion and a comforting stream of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. As in centuries past, when Irish missionaries kept alive the dimming light of faith on the continent of Europe, so today Ireland's sons and daughters go to all parts of the world, carrying the word and the work of Christ to those he wills to save. Among the Irish themselves there is a growing awareness and a generous sense of responsibility regarding the part to be played by the laity in the building up of the Kingdom of Christ. There is likewise a truly refreshing respect for marriage and the family and a realization that the home is the place where one first learns about God's love and how to serve him.

In receiving the faith from Saint Patrick, your people accepted a sense of values which has been their pride and their strength throughout the centuries. We are confident that the principles of Christianity will enable the Irish people to meet the challenges of the modern world, which is characterized by rapid and continual change.

Ireland today faces many problems, and the Irish people are deeply aware of their seriousness and urgency. In the face of deplorable delays or even of continuous disregard of these problems the temptation to hasten their solution even by violent means may become very strong. But violence as a solution is illusory. Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile violence with the righteousness that it is intent upon claiming or defending, whether this violence comes as a reaction to injustice or as a means of maintaining public order. Too often, especially in certain extreme manifestations that we are witnessing with great sorrow in these days, violence is rather the expression of revenge. Thus it is profoundly opposed to the spirit of Christianity, which urges us to go beyond the bounds of strict justice and embrace the commandment of brotherly love among all men.

The Christian faith must convince all concerned that violence is not an acceptable solution to the problems of Ireland.

But at the same time, the Christian sense of values convinces man that lasting peace can be built only on the firm foundation of justice. If there is to be peace, there must first be justice. Everyone must play his part. Obstacles which stand in the way of justice must be removed: obstacles such as civil inequity, social and political discrimination, and misunderstanding between individuals and groups. There must be a mutual and abiding respect for others: for their persons, their rights and their lawful aspirations.

We wish at this time to say how close we feel to those who have suffered and are suffering because of the present troubled situation. With a fervent desire to comfort the afflicted and encourage the distressed, we give assurance of our daily prayers for all, to whatever group they belong, who have suffered loss or injury and for all who have reason to grieve. May all be guided and sustained by the God of peace and consolation.

In our prayers we also ask that, in constant fidelity to her ancient religious tradition and through the heavenly intercession of our Blessed Mother and of Saint Patrick, Ireland may see her rich heritage of faith and culture prosper ever more abundantly. May all in Ireland be drawn closer by their common faith in Christ. May sentiments of brotherhood reign in their hearts, in a new era of justice and peace and respect for all.

We invoke these graces and every good gift from God on the people of Ireland, to whom we gladly impart our Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 6 March 1972.

PAULUS PP. VI