



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE
OF SCOTLAND ON THEIR AD LIMINA VISIT**

Thursday, 29 October 1992

Dear Brother Bishops, 1. "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Tim. 1:2). With great joy and fraternal affection I greet you, the *Bishops of Scotland*, who have come "to see Peter" (Gal. 1:18) as an integral moment of your pilgrimage to the tombs of the holy Apostles, Peter and Paul, founders of this venerable See which is "foremost in the universal communion of charity" (St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Romanos*, pro). Ten years ago, when I visited your beloved country, I was moved by innumerable manifestations of fidelity to the Bishop of Rome. It was clear that the medieval title, *Specialis Filia Romanae Ecclesiae*, remains an apt description of the Church in Scotland today, and for this we must give sincere thanks to God, since communion with the Apostolic See is the guarantee of the catholicity of your faith and practice. For centuries, tried in the crucible of suffering and persecution, you have been purified for the "great springtime of Christianity" (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 86) which the Lord is preparing for the Church as the third Millennium draws near. I rejoice with you for the blessings that the Lord lavishes upon your particular Churches, and I welcome today's opportunity to encourage you in your faith and pastoral responsibilities (Cf. Acts 20:28). In a special way I greet the Church in Glasgow, celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of its erection as a Metropolitan See by my predecessor Innocent VIII, and I give thanks for its faithfulness and missionary zeal. 2. One of your principal pastoral concerns is the *increasing indifference to religion* found in Scottish society. Throughout the Western world the Church confronts the challenges presented by practical atheism and by an ever more widespread individualism. Even if most people today do not outrightly reject the Creator, many have either forgotten him or act in such a way that he holds little place in their lives (Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 4). A distorted individualism that exalts self-fulfilment as the primary purpose of human life and regards society only as a means to pursue this self-interest contradicts the call to exist "for others" that God has inscribed in the hearts of his creatures (Cf. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7). Every style of life directed towards "having" rather than

"being" (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 36) has pernicious repercussions for individuals, the family and the wider community. How distant is such a culture of selfishness *from a civilization of love built upon communion and solidarity!* Not surprisingly, this individualistic mentality leads to many tragedies, not least of which are the increased number of broken families and, within the Church, a decreased participation in her sacramental life, especially by the young. Among the priorities of the new evangelization must be a concerted effort to bring back to the practice of their faith so-called "nominal Catholics" who are sporadic in their worship and selective in their adherence to Catholic teaching in matters of faith and morals.³ If the "signs of the times" alert us to these shadows on the horizon, they also present the Church in Scotland with *numerous opportunities for preaching Christ crucified*, "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24). As authoritative teachers of the faith and "stewards of the mysteries of God" (Cf. *ibid.* 4:1), you must uncover in wounded human hearts the yearning for God that often manifests itself in indirect and confused ways. If you draw upon the Church's traditional riches of teaching and devotion in proclaiming Christ unambiguously to the world, you will transmit a faith that reveals the true meaning of life and gives access to God's saving and sustaining grace. Humbly bearing in mind that the witness of a holy life is the most convincing affirmation of the Gospel, you are called as shepherds to take the first step in reaching out to those who do not come to you (Cf. Lk. 15:4-7). In particular I urge you to continue with vigour to promote and foster associations and movements for young people, as integral to a pastoral plan for the *youth apostolate*. Where such organizations flourish they ensure that the next generation receives the spiritual and apostolic formation that is vital for the laity's mission in the world. They are also a source of vocations to the priesthood and religious life (Cf. John Paul II, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 68). The importance of fostering vocations cannot be overlooked. Although "all the members of the Church, without exception, have the grace and responsibility to look after vocations, ...as the father and friend of his presbyterate, *it falls primarily to the Bishop to be concerned about 'giving continuity' to the priestly charism and ministry*, bringing it new forces by the laying on of hands" (*Ibid.* 41). To combat a further decline in the number of priests it is necessary both to encourage prayer for vocations and to guide the young to a mature personal relationship with Christ. From their communion and friendship with him, they will gain strength to offer themselves wholeheartedly to the service of the Church and of suffering humanity. By agreeing to establish a National Seminary at Chesters College, you have taken a courageous and commendable step. I join you in praying that this Seminary, together with the Colleges in Rome and Salamanca, will provide an even better spiritual, doctrinal and pastoral formation for seminarians and strengthen the bonds of charity and friendship among the Scottish priests of the future.⁴ A distressing isolationism marks contemporary society. To overcome this fragmentation the Church should encourage communities in which people can experience fellowship with Jesus Christ and with one another (Cf. 1 Jn. 1:3). *Parishes should continue to explore ways in which they can respond to the great hunger for community* felt by so many, where "the Catholic faith that comes to us from the Apostles" ("Eucharistic Prayer I") can be fully shared, strengthened and celebrated. More than a structure, a territory or a building, a parish should be "a fellowship inspired by the spirit of unity" (*Lumen Gentium*, 28), a Eucharistic community making present the one and indivisible Church of Christ.

Parishes must be centres of charity, open to the spiritual and material needs of the wider community. The time has come to commit the Church's energies to a new evangelization (Cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 3) beginning in the parish, a mission whose fruitfulness depends in no small measure upon the laity. Lay men and women play a vital role in bringing Christ to those who have forgotten him or who have yet to meet him (Cf. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 34). Your efforts to extend and promote adult catechesis and lay formation are of major importance for the realization of the Church's mission within Scottish society.⁵ For more than seventy years the Church in Scotland, with much sacrifice and dedication on the part of Religious, lay teachers and parents, has built up *an immense treasure in its system of Catholic schools*. As the primary educators of their children, parents have the right to expect that the teaching imparted by their schools will be shaped by a Catholic world-view held by the believing community and taught by its Pastors. While pursuing academic excellence, the Catholic school must resist the crippling relativism of a secularized society, which views with suspicion any idea of revealed religion or objective moral truth. Catholic educators should never lose sight of their responsibility to help the young to be open to the Lord who stands at the door, knocks and waits patiently to be admitted (Cf. Rev. 3:20). Catholic primary and secondary schools depend for their survival and well-being on the support and choices of Catholic parents. Through you I wish to call upon parents to renew their sense of obligation to such schools. Home, parish and school – all imbued with a *unified Catholic vision* – should be a single formative influence on young Scots, leading them to the full stature of their maturity in Christ (Cf. Eph. 4:13) and to a highly developed sense of solidarity and commitment to the common good.⁶ As moral leaders, you must never grow weary of repeating, as you insisted last August at the Conference in Stirling, that *the Church, the herald of the Gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ, belongs "in the heart of the world."* She continues his redemptive work, which "by its very nature concerns the salvation of humanity and also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order" (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 5). In the midst of your flock as those who serve (Cf. Mk. 10:45), the more you are immersed in the hopes and joys, the fears and pains of your people, the more attentively your preaching will be heeded. Among those crying out for concrete signs of the Church's solidarity today are the "outcasts" at our gates (Cf. Lk. 16:20) whose dignity is so frequently threatened and undermined – the poor, migrants, the unemployed and the marginalized. To guarantee the Church's presence, *do not hesitate to encourage your people to take an active role in public life*, so that they may effectively promote the inviolable dignity of each human person in every sector of society. The ecclesial community's activity in favour of justice and development can be measured by the vitality of the associations and organizations through which Catholics fulfil their vocation of seeking the Kingdom of God "by engaging in temporal affairs and ordering these in accordance with the will of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 31). In this regard, your people are also to be commended for their generous contributions to the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which promotes solidarity at home and abroad. Above all, I give thanks to Almighty God for your zeal in *defending the sacred right to life*. As you have so vigorously demonstrated, a Bishop's responsibilities are not confined to the sanctuary, pulpit or chancery. He has a public role to discharge, especially speaking for those who have no voice. The unborn and the dying depend on the power of your voice to rescue them and

to witness that the Church "believes that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a gift of God's goodness" (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 30). Direct abortion and euthanasia are never morally justifiable, no matter what the laws of a country may permit. Take to heart Saint Paul's urgent plea to Titus: "Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you" (Tit. 2:15).⁷ Since the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Christians in Scotland have laboured to restore unity among all those who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The rancour and prejudices that sometimes marked past relations have, with God's help, been replaced by a notable growth in mutual understanding. Your participation in ventures such as "Action for Churches Together in Scotland" testifies to the great progress that has been made. Thirty years after the opening of the Second Vatican Council, we must persevere in prayer and continue to work, *with patience and renewed vigour, to re-establish full communion among Christ's followers*, a unity "which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning" (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4).⁸ Dear Brothers, as you continue to build up the Body of Christ in Scotland, relying on him whose power is at work within you (Cf. Eph. 3:20), *open wide the gates to Christ our Redeemer*. Jesus Christ walks "with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption and with the power of the love that is radiated by that truth" (John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 13). Place your trust completely in him, for he is ever faithful. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, will sustain you in all that he calls you to do for his people. I pray that Our Lady, the Morning Star heralding the coming Millennium of hope, will intercede for you, for the priests who share in your ministry, for the Religious who dedicate themselves to prayer and spreading the Gospel, and for all the people of your beloved Scotland. With profound affection for each of you and as a sign of our communion in Jesus Christ, I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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