



The Holy See

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

Friday, 25 April 1997

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. As the Church continues to celebrate with Paschal joy "the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3), I welcome you - *the Bishops of Scotland* - in the love of our Lord and Saviour: "Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev 1:4). Your visit *ad Limina Apostolorum* is a celebration of the profound, grace-filled nature of the collegial communion which unites us in the service of Christ and his Church. At the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul you re-affirm your fidelity and that of the Catholic people of Scotland to the Successor of Peter, the Rock upon whom the Lord continues to build his Church (cf. Mt 16:18). I wish you to know that in the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of your ministry I have never ceased to "remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have" (Philem 4-5).

As we prepare to enter the Third Millennium, the Holy Spirit urges the Church to accomplish her sacred duty of preaching the Gospel to all creation (cf. Mk 16:16). The Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 calls us to intensify our efforts to carry forward Christ's mission in the world. The Church in Scotland is celebrating two great anniversaries of its own, which add particular confirmation and strength to that call. The ninth of June marks the 1,400th anniversary of the death of Saint Columba, the great apostle of the highlands and islands of Scotland. His apostolic labours gave renewed impulse to the diffusion of the faith brought to northern Britain two centuries earlier by Saint Ninian, whose 1,600th anniversary, by a happy coincidence, you will also celebrate this year, in August. The heroism, dedication and holiness of those intrepid evangelizers still shine forth

today as a model above all for pastors of souls in proclaiming Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8).

2. You are fortunate to have as your co-workers priests who are truly "men of God", generous in facing the perennial yet ever new demands of their ministry. To them also I send my affectionate greetings, and in this context I invite you to encourage, develop and deepen the initiatives of recent years designed to strengthen the spirituality of the diocesan priesthood, understood as *an ever deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus* (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 57). Do all you can to foster a sure and faithful sense of the priest's identity. This will be the indispensable basis for a sustained effort to promote more abundant vocations to the service of God's People in the ordained ministry.

If the Church in Scotland is to meet successfully the challenge of evangelization in the Third Christian Millennium, it must continue to ensure that a sufficient number of talented young men respond now to Christ's call. Your seminaries have the delicate task of inspiring these candidates to Orders with the ideal of the priesthood so that, after the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation which the Church in her wisdom has laid down for future ministers of the Altar, new priests can go forth to build up, through their preaching and the celebration of the sacraments, Christian communities centred on the saving presence of the Risen Lord.

In serving the Church you and your priests can count on the support of the dedicated members of Institutes of Consecrated Life present in your country, who bear witness to that undivided love for Christ and his Church expressed through the observance of the evangelical counsels. Together let us thank the Lord of the harvest for the Religious of your Dioceses. Let them know that they are loved and appreciated as your trusted collaborators in the community of faith.

3. The aspect of your episcopal ministry upon which I principally wish to reflect with you is your role as *teachers of the faith*. The faithful look to the Bishops to be "authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people assigned them" (*Lumen Gentium*, 25). Hence, with the Apostle Paul, I solemnly urge you: "Proclaim the message, whether the time is favourable or not" (2 Tim 4:2). A Bishop's first duty is to preach Jesus Christ, "the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings" (cf. Phil 3:10). In him alone can man find the meaning of his existence here on earth: he is the centre of creation, and all human history is directed towards him as its only explanation and end. *The duty of fearlessly proclaiming the Gospel becomes all the more pressing when society begins to lose its sense of God: as Bishops we must be tireless in recalling our fellow men to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.*

I urge you therefore to "bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37) constantly and vigorously, ensuring that your people receive that truth which sets them free (cf. Jn 8:32). Courageous, forthright and persuasive teaching which applies the Church's doctrine to practical local situations is essential in order to sustain the spiritual and moral life of the faithful. It is also an effective means of re-

evangelizing those who "have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 33). Working out the implications of the Gospel for Christian life in the world and applying it to new situations is crucial to your ecclesial leadership, especially through individual or joint Pastoral Letters on vital questions of faith and morals. This is a time for Catholics - together with other Christians - to bring the freshness of the Gospel to the struggle to *defend and promote the fundamental values upon which to build a society truly worthy of man*.

4. As you have often proposed in your teaching, the renewal of the Christian community and of society at the dawn of the Third Millennium *passes by way of the family*. The strengthening of the *communion of persons* in the family is the great antidote to the self-indulgence and sense of isolation so common today. The pastoral care of the family requires of you "personal interest, care, time, personnel and resources, but above all personal support for the families and for all those who, in the various diocesan structures, assist you in the pastoral care of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 73). You need to instill a new confidence that Christ the Bridegroom accompanies married couples, strengthening them with the power of his grace and enabling them to serve life and love in accordance with God's plan "from the beginning" (cf. Mt 19:6). The diocesan agencies involved, as well as parishes and schools, should be keenly aware of the pressing need to prepare young people for married life and parenthood, and every effort should be made to implement practical ways of supporting existing marriages and assisting couples in difficulties.

Mindful of the good of individuals and of society, and in obedience to the divine will, the Church never ceases to proclaim that *marriage is a permanent covenant of life and love*. But, as you know so well, there is the special problem today of the divorced and remarried. Pastoral charity demands that they should not be marginalized from the community of faith but shown the love that the Shepherd has for those in difficulty (cf. Lk 15:3-7). Without crushing the bruised reed or quenching the dimly burning wick (cf. Is 42:3), or - at the other extreme - emptying of meaning the Church's teaching on the indissolubility of marriage, every parish should be seen to be a family in which everyone can experience the welcome and healing, as well as the forgiveness and reconciliation, offered by the Father who is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4).

5. Likewise, I wish to express to you and the Scottish faithful my profound appreciation of your resolute efforts to *defend the inviolable dignity of human life* against old and new threats - threats sometimes disguised as compassion - directed against unborn children, the handicapped, the seriously ill and the dying. There is ample room for action by individuals, families, movements and associations in the task of building "a society in which the dignity of each person is recognized and protected and the lives of all are defended and enhanced" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 90). Your efforts to help mothers uncertain about whether to welcome their unborn children deserve the support of the whole ecclesial community and indeed of all persons of good will.

The faithful also look to you to make ever more widely known, with clarity and compassion, the

Church's teaching on *the end-of-life questions increasingly faced by families and health-care personnel*. In Sacred Scripture nothing is clearer than the Lord's sovereignty over life and death. The word of God teaches that no one "can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die; the absolute master of such a decision is the Creator alone" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 47). He is the One in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This teaching should be seen in the wider context of the whole Christian approach to life, whereby "the redemptive value of suffering, accepted and offered to God with love, derives from the sacrifice of Christ himself, who calls the members of his Mystical Body to share in his sufferings" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 78). The path to a culture of life passes necessarily by way of sharing in the mystery of Calvary.

I encourage the Church in Scotland - especially its priests, catechists and Catholic teachers - not to lose heart in the struggle to defend the inviolable and sacred value of every life, but to stand guard at the gate, to protect the weak and the vulnerable, and to work to persuade your fellow-citizens that the renewal of society must be founded on respect for objective and universally valid moral truths and values.

6. Among other vital concerns of your ministry, you rightly regard *Catholic schools as central to the Church's mission in Scotland*. A great debt of gratitude is due to the priests, Religious and lay faithful who labour so selflessly in the apostolate of education. The purpose of these schools must be to provide the kind of educational environment where children and adolescents can grow to maturity imbued with love of Christ and the Church. The specific identity of Catholic schools should be reflected throughout the curriculum and in every area of school life, precisely so that they may be communities in which the faith is nourished and pupils are prepared for their mission in the Church and society. More than in the past, Catholic schools need to emphasize evangelization and catechesis, for in so many cases proper religious formation in the home is lacking (cf. *Catechesi Tradendae*, 18-19). Teachers in Catholic schools must be able and willing to transmit the Catholic faith in all its fullness, beauty and power. For this they must be guided in their own lives by "the word of truth" which is the Gospel of salvation (cf. Eph 1:13). I am aware that you have vigorously reaffirmed the Church's right to establish, conduct and govern schools freely and in accordance with the right of Catholic parents to have a means of ensuring their children's education in the faith (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 8). Whenever these rights are threatened a decisive response is called for.

7. Dear Brothers in the Episcopacy, speaking of educating young people reminds us of the forthcoming *World Youth Day in Paris*, a gathering of young men and women who will be leaders of evangelization and social renewal in the future (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 46). As Bishops, it is our responsibility to invite and welcome young adults - with their spiritual hunger, idealism and vitality - more completely into the Church's life. They are searching, sometimes in a confused way, for the fullness of life which is found only in Jesus Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). They expect the Church and her leaders to present a serious programme of formation in sound Catholic doctrine and to encourage personal and liturgical prayer and the frequent reception of the

Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. Young people expect to be challenged by the Church, and they know how to respond with great generosity. When we encourage their passion for justice, their solidarity with the marginalized and their yearning for peace, their commitment makes a unique contribution to "building up the Body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). The *youth ministry* should be focused on the *parish*, so as to ensure that the young are not isolated from the broader community of faith and worship. As experience confirms, it is also often helpful to supplement parish activities with membership of Catholic youth associations, movements and groups that meet their specific needs (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37).

8. As the Great Jubilee draws near, the Church advances along her pilgrim way, watching and waiting for her Lord, the Alpha and the Omega, who makes "all things new" (Rev 21:5). I invite the Church in Scotland to implore from "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor 1:3) the grace "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). I pray that the Risen Lord will ever increase the fervour of the priests, Religious and laity of your Dioceses, that the good work he has begun in them may come to fruition (cf. Phil 1:6). Thanking you for your commitment and dedication, and entrusting you to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, and to the intercession of your heavenly Patrons, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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