



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr NOEL FAHEY
NEW AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo
Saturday, 15 September 2007*

Your Excellency,

1. It is with particular pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ireland to the Holy See. I would ask you kindly to convey to your President, Mrs Mary McAleese, and to the Government and people of your country my gratitude for their good wishes. I warmly reciprocate them and assure the citizens of your nation of my prayers for their spiritual well-being.

2. As Your Excellency has observed, for over sixteen hundred years Christianity has shaped the cultural, moral and spiritual identity of the Irish people. This is not simply a matter of historical importance. It lies at the heart of Irish civilization and it remains as a 'leaven' in the life of your nation. Indeed, the Christian faith has lost nothing of its significance for contemporary society since it touches "man's deepest sphere" and gives "meaning to his life in the world" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 10), enabling both civic and religious leaders to uphold the absolute values and ideals inherent in the dignity of every person and necessary for every democracy.

3. In recent years Ireland has enjoyed unprecedented economic growth. This prosperity has undoubtedly brought material comfort to many, but in its wake secularism has also begun to encroach and leave its mark. Against the backdrop of these developments, I was interested to learn of the recent launch of a 'structured dialogue' between the Church and the Government. I applaud the initiative. Some might question whether the Church is entitled to make a contribution to the governance of a nation. In a pluralist democratic society should not faith and religion be restricted to the private sphere? The historical rise of brutal totalitarian regimes, contemporary scepticism in the face of political rhetoric, and a growing uneasiness with the lack of ethical points

of reference governing recent scientific advances – one need only think of the field of bio-engineering – all point to the imperfections and limitations found within both individuals and society. Recognition of those imperfections indicates the importance of a rediscovery of moral and ethical principles, and the need both to recognize the limits of reason and to understand its essential relationship of complementarity with faith and religion.

The Church, in articulating revealed truth, serves all members of society by shedding light on the foundation of morality and ethics, and by purifying reason, ensuring that it remains open to the consideration of ultimate truths and draws upon wisdom. Far from threatening the tolerance of differences or cultural plurality, or usurping the role of the State, such a contribution illuminates the very truth which makes consensus possible and keeps public debate rational, honest and accountable. When truth is disregarded, relativism takes its place: instead of being governed by principles, political choices are determined more and more by public opinion, values are overshadowed by procedures and targets, and indeed the very categories of good and evil, and right and wrong, give way to the pragmatic calculation of advantage and disadvantage.

4. The Northern Ireland Peace Process has been a long and arduous endeavour. At last, there is hope that it will bear enduring fruit. Peace has been achieved through widespread international support, determined political resolve on the part of both the Irish and the British Governments, and the readiness of individuals and communities to embrace the sublime human capacity to forgive. The entire international human family has taken heart from this outcome and welcomes this wave of hope sent across the world that conflict, no matter how engrained, can be overcome. It is my fervent prayer that the peace which is already bringing renewal to the North will inspire political and religious leaders in other troubled zones of our world to recognize that only upon forgiveness, reconciliation and mutual respect can lasting peace be built. To this end, I welcome your own Government's commitment to deploy both experience and resources in the prevention and resolution of conflict, as well as its pledge to increase various forms of assistance to developing countries.

5. Your Excellency, like many nations around the globe, Ireland has in recent years made care of the environment one of its priorities in both domestic policy and international relations. The promotion of sustainable development and particular attention to climate change are indeed matters of grave importance for the entire human family, and no nation or business sector should ignore them. As scientific research demonstrates the worldwide effects that human actions can have on the environment, the complexity of the vital relationship between the ecology of the human person and the ecology of nature becomes increasingly apparent (cf. *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, 8).

The full understanding of this relationship is found in the natural and moral order with which God has created man and endowed the earth (*ibid.*, 8-9). Curiously, while the majesty of God's fingers in creation (cf. *Ps* 8:3) is readily recognized, the full acknowledgement of the glory and splendour

with which he has specifically crowned man (cf. *Ps* 8:5) is at times less readily understood. A kind of split morality ensues. The great and vital moral themes of peace, non-violence, justice, and respect for creation do not in themselves confer dignity on man. The primary dimension of morality stems from the innate dignity of human life) from the moment of conception to natural death) a dignity conferred by God himself. God's loving act of creation must be understood as a whole. How disturbing it is that not infrequently the very social and political groups that, admirably, are most attuned to the awe of God's creation pay scant attention to the marvel of life in the womb. Let us hope that, especially among young people, emerging interest in the environment will deepen their understanding of the proper order and magnificence of God's creation of which man and woman stand at the centre and summit.

6. Your Excellency, I am sure that your appointment will further strengthen the bonds of friendship which already exist between Ireland and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities you will find that the various offices of the Roman Curia are most ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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