



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR PHILIP MC DONAGH
AMBASSADOR OF IRELAND TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 4 September 2004

Mr Ambassador,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of Ireland to the Holy See. I thank you for the generous words of greeting which you have addressed to me on behalf of President Mary McAleese, and I ask you kindly to convey to her and to all the beloved Irish people my cordial best wishes and the assurance of my prayers. Ireland is rightly proud of its ancient heritage of warm hospitality and generous assistance to those in need. Based on a Christian love of neighbour and nurtured in stable family life, these virtues have formed the "soul" of Ireland and continue to be one of its most precious resources. The unwritten story of so many Irish men and women who have dedicated their lives to serve others is one of the most impressive chapters of your country's history. I very much appreciate your thoughtful reference to one of them, the late Archbishop Michael Courtney, who offered the supreme sacrifice of his life to bring peace and well-being to the suffering people of Burundi. It is encouraging to see that the same love of neighbour inspires so many young Irish people who generously volunteer their time, their talents and their professional skills for the service of others. In this spirit of assistance to those in need Ireland has done much within the international community to alleviate suffering by providing financial assistance, educational opportunities and professional guidance, and by sending emergency relief funds and peace-keeping troops when requested. The experience of generations of Irish emigrants has made your people aware of the serious difficulties and precarious conditions often encountered by individuals and families seeking a new beginning in a foreign land. This sensitivity represents a great resource for developing a mature culture of acceptance. Such a culture calls for generosity and openness to legitimate diversity, while demanding a necessary respect for the nation's cultural patrimony and a commitment to the promotion of adequate forms of integration (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, 101-102). The plight of refugees and those displaced by poverty, war or persecution is particularly dramatic and calls for special consideration and generosity. The Holy See hopes that the steps taken during the Irish presidency of the European Union in favour of policies of openness to other peoples will continue to inspire the community's attitude to immigrants from other continents and cultures. I encourage your country to continue to address this important humanitarian problem together with your European counterparts with an open heart and a persevering commitment. As Your Excellency has noted, Ireland has recently undergone significant social changes, including remarkable economic growth. A more

prosperous society has greater possibilities of becoming a more just and open society, but it is also faced with new challenges, including the danger of a certain spiritual impoverishment and indifference to the deeper moral and religious dimensions of life. Your country's aspiration to become a profoundly modern society, within the family of European nations, will find its highest expression in a commitment to reaffirming above all the incomparable dignity and the right to life of each human person. I am confident that by remaining true to the values which have shaped Ireland as a nation from the time of its evangelization, your people will help to make an outstanding contribution to the future of Europe (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, 96). You have mentioned Ireland's hopes for the peace process. I pray that every effort is being made to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Good Friday Agreement, which has given new impulse and new hope to the people of Northern Ireland. The Catholic Church in Ireland working together with other Christian communities is committed to consolidating positive attitudes of comprehension, respect and esteem of others through ecumenical activities and educational efforts. The message of the Gospel cannot be separated from the call to a change of heart; neither can evangelization be isolated from ecumenism and the promotion of fellowship, reconciliation and openness to others, especially to other Christians. May the initiatives of all those who seek peace and reconciliation be blessed by God's grace and bear fruit for the children of tomorrow. Mr Ambassador, you begin your duties as the Representative of your country to the Holy See in the same year that we together celebrate the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of our diplomatic relations. Let me assure you of my prayers for the success of your mission. I ask Almighty God's abundant blessings upon you and your family and upon the beloved people of Ireland.

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