

AD LIMINA VISIT OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SCOTLAND

5 FEBRUARY 2010

ADDRESS BY CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN, PRESIDENT OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SCOTLAND

TO HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Most Holy Father,

Greeting

The Bishops' Conference of Scotland is honoured to be received by Your Holiness on the occasion of our visit *Ad Limina Apostolorum*. We bring you the prayers and love of the Catholics of Scotland, and the good wishes of the whole Scottish people.

Each year, together with the Apostolic Nuncio to Great Britain, we solemnly celebrate the anniversary of your election as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the Universal Church. We are pleased to take that special annual opportunity to bring the Petrine Ministry of the Pope before the people of Scotland and their representatives, and to offer prayers that God may bless and protect you.

When in 1878 Pope Leo XIII re-established the Scottish hierarchy the Holy See acknowledged Scotland as a distinct nation, albeit within a Kingdom formed from the union of the Scottish and English crowns subsequent to the Reformation. As Scots Catholics we are proud of our nation's long relationship with the Holy See.

It has been a feature of Your Holiness' teaching to remind Europe of its Christian roots and culture. In the same way, we as bishops have drawn the attention of the Scottish people to the fact that the human and democratic values of a modern and diverse Scotland can only be enhanced by continuing to draw upon its Christian foundation as the nation explores its own identity and charts a new future.

Your Holiness has let it be known that you will visit Great Britain in the autumn, and we are thrilled that your visit will include Scotland. We remember with joy the visit of your venerable predecessor, Pope John Paul II, in 1982. We are certain that the Scottish people will give Your Holiness a heartfelt welcome. We hope that your visit to Scotland later this year will bring us renewed encouragement, vigour and joy as we seek to serve Christ in the circumstances of the present day.

Education

Providentially, Your Holiness will visit Scotland in mid-September around the time of the feast of St. Ninian. St. Ninian, ordained a bishop in Rome, was the first to teach the message of Christ in Scotland and to begin to bind the Scottish people to the See of Peter. The relationship between the Catholic Church and education in Scotland was given an even more profound significance a thousand years later in the foundation by papal authority of three of our great Scottish universities at St. Andrews in 1413, Glasgow in 1451, and Aberdeen in 1495. Then, due to the arduous circumstances created by the Scottish Reformation, your predecessor, Pope Clement VIII established the Pontifical Scots College here in Rome in 1600 as a centre of education for young Scottish Catholic men. This college quickly became a house of formation for priests and has continued to serve the Catholic Church in Scotland as a seminary for more than 400 years.

Vocations to the priesthood and the formation of our seminarians together constitute a priority for the Catholic Church in Scotland. In terms of Scotland's young people as a whole, Catholic schools at primary and secondary level continue this fine tradition of Catholic education as a service not just to the Catholic community but to the wider Scottish society. As part of the public provision of education Catholic schools represent a special locus wherein the Catholic Church and the State are full partners.

Papal Teaching

Your Holiness, we have been inspired and enriched by the transparency and the profundity of your teaching, which has in turn inspired us in our duty as teachers of the faith. We note that many people of other Christian denominations and representatives of other faith traditions in our country actually look to our Church for leadership in the great religious, moral and ethical issues of the time. They too welcome the prospect of a visit to our land from Your Holiness in the hope that they may gain a deeper appreciation of Jesus Christ and of the way in which faith and reason come together to shed God's light on the questions which both fascinate and trouble the human spirit. What does it mean to be a human person who is open to the transcendent mystery of God? How is this transcendence mediated definitively by Jesus Christ? How is human transcendence expressed in the moral and ethical choices we make about how we live and how we die?

Ecumenism

In your pontificate you have insisted on the importance of continuing to seek the unity for which Christ prayed. You yourself have offered the Church a particularly eloquent example of ecumenical openness by responding in such a singular way to certain Anglican groups who wish full communion with the See of Peter. For many reasons this period in history may be seen as a challenging time on the journey of Christian Unity. Nonetheless we are committed to the ecumenical dimension of the life of the Catholic Church in Scotland, not least through our membership of the ecumenical instrument known as Action of Churches Together in Scotland, or simply as ACTS. Later this year we will share in the centenary celebrations of the Edinburgh Missionary Congress of 1910 which is regarded as the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement. This year also marks the 450th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. The Reformers insisted upon the primacy of the Sacred Scriptures. It is more important now than ever that Christians allow themselves to be renewed by the Word of God as indispensable for the unity of the Church. Ecumenical engagement must also extend to ensuring that the Christian tradition of faith and morals is articulated, promoted and defended.

Conclusion

Your Holiness, we once again thank you for receiving us today. With respectful anticipation we await your message, hoping for your guidance for our ministry as bishops. Holy Father, we ask your Apostolic Blessing for us, for our priests and our people, and for Scotland.