

'CATHOLIC CHURCH REFORM: NO MORE THRONES'

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

THE HUMBERT SUMMER SCHOOL

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I love the Irish. I love you for your smiling Irish eyes, for your impish sense of humor, for your great gift of the gab, for the poetry in your souls, for the intelligence and the beauty and the leadership of your women.

I must confess that I always fall in love with Irish girls. My three children are half Irish -- and they have smiling Irish eyes, an impish sense of humor, the gift of the gab, and poetry in their souls. They have also generated six beautiful young children, much like them.

I also love you for your revolutionary spirit.

When John Cooney invited me to speak at this, your 24th annual jamboree of ideas, I knew I would be among my own kind, speaking in the memory and honour of the French General, Jean Humbert, who landed here in County Mayo in 1798 to assist Irish rebels against the English.

Our kinship comes from our histories. My country was born in revolt against English tyranny in 1776. Your struggle goes back in history much further than that. As you all know, your struggle against the English began when the Normans arrived in Wexford in 1169. You were struggling in 1798, when General Jean Humbert came to your aid against the British - in a losing cause. And you were still fighting in the early part of the 20th century before you finally won the freedom you have today.

This is another thing I love about the Irish: you don't quit in the face of tyranny.

This is important, because your struggle for freedom today needs men and women with staying power, and, of course, faith, hope, charity—and, God being good to us, a sense of humour.

When I speak about your struggle for freedom, I am not talking about your freedom from British tyranny. I am talking about your struggle against another colonializing power that perhaps you never quite thought of as a colonializing power.

Who? I am talking about the modern papacy, Rome and the pope, who has so much in common with your historic British overlords.

Until the Copernican revolution, monarchs exercised absolute control over their subjects by divine right. But when the peoples of the world, informed by a new cosmology, put the divine right of kings into history's dust bin, they forgot to toss the divine right of popes into the garbage, too. As a consequence, the popes have been getting away with this "divine right" nonsense for too long, since long after thinking Catholics knew it was nonsense.

I am not attacking our Catholic faith. I am talking about the special and corrosive tyranny that popes have been exercising over Catholics everywhere for the past few hundred years, and, dating back to the middle of the 19th century, over Ireland's Catholics (who were then too unformed and too uninformed to offer much resistance).

From 1849 to 1878, Paul Cullen, Ireland's first cardinal, built a clerical Irish Church that marched in total loyalty to Rome and his own overreaching authority. As you know, an overreaching authority is not real, like the natural authority a good father and a good mother have with their children. Natural authority helps people grow. Artificial authority knocks people down. It scares them.

Dublin's Archbishop John Charles McQuaid put his own special twists on Cardinal Cullen's authoritarian model. From 1940 to his retirement in 1972, McQuaid imposed his will on the Dublin Church and on Irish society, instilling fear of his disfavor in his priests and, in the people, fear for their eternal salvation.

Cullen constructed and McQuaid consolidated a two-level clerical system in the Church, with free men (the holy priests) on the upper deck, and below in steerage

class, the slaves (the sinful laity) who were never allowed to ask an impertinent question, like, "Father, are you fiddlin' with my little Tom?"

The cardinal and the archbishop established the clerical culture in Ireland that Judge Yvonne Murphy identified as the root cause of the Irish scandals that have sent you and your nation reeling.

According to Judge Murphy's report, four successive archbishops of Dublin, McQuaid, Dermot Ryan, Kevin McNamara, and Cardinal Desmond Connell, failed to tell the police that priests were abusing children, often the poorest of your nation's children. Clerics were able to do their dirty deeds in secret, hiding between their reputed holy-because-they-were-celibate image. If the families of the abused children complained, they were punished, or bought off in return for their silence. When the cover came off, we finally got the answer to the question we were afraid to ask: Yes, Father was fiddlin' our little Toms - with the tacit permission of their bishops who had been evasive about the truth to preserve the holy reputation of the clerical caste.

John Cooney summed things up in an analysis for the *Irish Independent*. "In the public revulsion and shame accompanying the state investigations into Ferns, the religious orders, and now the Archdiocese of Dublin, Irish society has been stunned by the collapse of the credibility and moral authority of bishops." He might have added, but it had not yet been proven, that the bishops covered up as a matter of policy set by the Vatican *under the direction of one Joseph Ratzinger*.

That news made previous calls for Papa Ratzinger to deal with the causes of the situation look fatuous. He hasn't addressed himself to the causes (which have everything to do with the two-level, upper-deck, lower-deck purple culture that once struck fear in your hearts and corrupted your children) because he himself has been swimming in that culture for most of his life. I dare say that if I challenged him about this purple culture, he wouldn't even know what I am talking about. He is like the salmon that swims in the waters of your River Moy, who does not recognize water until he is caught out of it.

In his recent apostolic Letter to the Catholics of Ireland, Pope Benedict didn't talk about the cover up, because he was part of it. Which is why his words of apology rang so hollow.

The most significant actions of Benedict's papacy so far are his attacks on women. He has excommunicated women who have "attempted ordination." And he has set in motion two investigations of religious orders of women in the United States, one of them a doctrinal inquiry by the pope's heresy-hunting department. Will this be the pope's Final Solution to the problem of the Church's uppity, too-well-educated women? Excommunication? Condemnation as heretics by the Holy Office of the Inquisition? (In my humble opinion, our American nuns, the bravest, most generous Jesus-people in the universe, should be investigating the Vatican.)

Oh yes. The pope has taken some action in Ireland. He is sending nine legates here this autumn to fix what his minions are now delicately referring to as *la situazione*.

One of the legates, Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, has bragged that His Holiness wants to straighten out Ireland -- by taking its Catholics back to the upper-deck, lower-deck system of Cullen and McQuaid.

That system isn't working. It wasn't working a hundred years ago. It wasn't working in 1959, when Pope John XXIII called a Council to update the Church.

At Vatican II, a ten to one majority of bishops redefined the Church as "the people of God." That hit at the heart of papal absolutism. In effect, the Council Fathers said to us: "The Pope is not the Church. Your bishop is not the Church. You are the Church. Believe in your Church. Believe in yourselves." DID YOU HEAR THAT? BELIEVE IN YOURSELVES.

The Vatican II bishops were saying the exact opposite of what Pius Ninth announced during the 1870 debate on papal infallibility at Vatican I. During that debate one of his aides came to him and pointed out that infallibility was "not in the Church's tradition."

Pio Nono said, *Traditio sono Io. Io sono la chiesa*. No one had ever expressed papal absolutism quite so clearly: "I am tradition. I am the Church."

I was privileged to chronicle the historic reversal of that attitude when I covered Vatican II for *Time* magazine in the 1960s. I watched Popes John XXIII and then Paul VI, more than 2,000 bishops and almost as many theologians, begin to rethink everything that generations of Catholics had taken for granted. EVERYTHING!

They worked out a new charter to return 'the People of God' to a more simple Christianity. Almost overnight, the Church discovered a new view of what it could be -- and should be: more democratic, more pluralistic, more free, more human, more humble in the face of history. The Council's charter made the Church less Roman, and more catholic; less a Church of laws, more a Church of love.

The idea was to help people, not hurt them; stop frightening them with a list of "thou shalt nots", and start emphasizing the Good News of Christ. The Council saw the world as essentially good, because it was redeemed by Christ - and would continue to be redeemed by our ongoing Jesus-witness for justice and peace. WASN'T THAT A WONDERFUL, NEW MESSAGE?

When the Council's editors pored over the final draft of its landmark document on "The Church in the Modern World," they paused over its opening words -- *Luctus et angor*, "grief and anxiety." Was this the proper way to start their manifesto, with the words "grief and anxiety?" No. They did one of those quick editorial fixes that anyone who has worked in the word business can only consider inspired. They moved the words *Luctus et angor* aside and inserted the words *Gaudium et spes* -- "joy and hope." They were exactly the right words to set the tone not only for this document, but for the entire Council. AT LAST! JOY AND HOPE!

But what had really changed? Nothing, NOTHING except the way these editors chose to look at the document and then strike a new chord for a new kind of Church.

Unfortunately, many bishops returned home so deaf to the new joyous chord that they failed to convey its message of hope. Archbishop McQuaid promised his people in Dublin that, after the Council, "nothing will change." .

Pope Paul VI seemed to go deaf, too. He had championed the Council's new charter for a people's Church. He had put his blessing on the work of John XXIII's birth control commission but Paul VI pulled back when advisors in his Curia warned him that, if he accepted its conclusions -- that a couple can and should make love, even when they have good reasons not to make a baby -- he would lose his moral authority. Paul VI took the Curia's advice -- and lost his moral authority.

Paul VI's two successors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI did everything they could to make the Church less human and more severe; more a Church of laws than a Church of love, more Roman and less Catholic, and sometimes less Christian.

Vatican II proclaimed that Christ had to have an African face in Africa and an Asian face in Asia. John Paul II didn't get it. He frowned at efforts in Africa to create an encultured African Church in Africa. In a dozen trips to Africa during his papacy, he wasn't promoting the face of an African Jesus so much as he was selling Africans a commodity, papal celebrity -- the Pope as hero, the Pope as a god.

John Paul II also vetoed attempts by Americans to incorporate important elements of American culture--democracy and freedom and equality--into their American Church. Those Catholic thinkers who might have guided that adaptation most tellingly--for example, some American theologians mentored by the Jesuit John Courtney Murray--pulled back in fear-- once they discovered that the Pope and Cardinal Ratzinger had set key American bishops to the task of watching them.

Those bishops were John Paul II-bishops, more Roman than Catholic. They did what John Paul told them to do: they silenced independent voices in the Church, they tried to make women who felt they had priestly vocations into heretics, and they used the threat of excommunication to intimidate Americans in political life.

And they drove people out of the Church. Some 80 percent of American Catholics do not go to Mass much any more. I understand the numbers are pretty close to that in Ireland, where almost all of your young people and many of your women of all ages say they have "left the Church."

What have I said so far? That, for a thousand years, popes have promoted a clerical Church instead of a peoples Church, that the Fathers of Vatican II worked for four serious years to give the Church back to the people, and that Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI spent the next thirty years repealing their labor and allowing corruption to reign, a move that has left our Church, which is Christ's body on earth, broken.

What can we do about this broken Church?

We can lament its brokenness and continue to pray, pay, and shut up. Or we can leave it, leave it to the pope and his bishops, who will soon look ridiculous when the

base of their ecclesiastical pyramid disappears and they find themselves running in some kind of imaginary space, like Wile E. Coyote chasing the roadrunner off the edge of the mesa and then falling to the bottom of the cliff.

Half the Catholics in your country and mine have "left the Church." They find Jesus in other Christian communities, or they start up their own small-faith groups, re-creating the kind of community that existed in the first century--a brotherhood and sisterhood of Jesus-people who meet periodically (generally in someone's home) to break bread together in prayer -- with or without the presence of a priest. Last Sunday, in Cleveland, Ohio, the people of St. Peter's parish, which had been closed in April by Bishop Richard Lennon, put their own little twist on that idea. They celebrated their own Mass in leased commercial space with their former pastor presiding. Bishop Lennon has told them they are in schism, If they set up an alternative parish outside his jurisdiction, he said, their salvation is in danger. By all accounts, the people of St. Peter's are not frightened.

I am here tonight to tell you there's another way. We don't have to leave our parishes. We or our parents or our grandparents paid for them and built them. They are ours. We don't have to leave our Church, either. Why abandon our stake in the entire Catholic infrastructure to the bishops and the pray-pay-and-obey passive Catholics and the Taliban Catholics? It is our Church. There is nothing sacred about the ecclesiastic pyramid of power. Jesus didn't set it up. It did not take serious shape until the eleventh century. Men made it. Men (and women) can unmake it. Or re-make it.

This is not just my idea. I am only the herald of an idea that was planted in me by the Fathers of Vatican II, and by my intimate conversations with Pope John XXIII and then, over the next thirty years, with some of the world's best theologians and historians. They taught me that we could fix much of what was wrong with the Church by harking back to the way the Church was in the beginning. (Paradoxically, they said, we have to go back in history in order to go ahead.)

In apostolic times, there was no hierarchy, no Roman Catholic Church. There was a family of Jesus-followers in Jerusalem, in Alexandria, in what is now Beirut and Antioch and Ephesus and, a little later, in Rome. Each of them grew, each in their own ways, and in their own cultures.

Their Churches were "autochthonous." Now autochthonous is a scary, fifteen-Euro Greek word that is hard to pronounce, but easy to understand. All it means is "home-grown" or "local." But it's an important word because in that concept, we have a legitimate, tradition-tested answer to our principal question: how can we have an accountable Church in Ireland, or Scotland, or the United States, how can we be Irish Catholics, or Scottish Catholics, or American Catholics and still find a place under the Catholic umbrella? We will do it by becoming autochthonous, that is not in schism, firm in our traditional Catholic faith, but with a new way of governing ourselves.

There are now 21 autochthonous Churches, all with their own patriarchs, their own priests (some married, some not), with their own liturgies (or rites), their own language, their own customs. They are all Catholic, with the same faith (expressed in shared creeds). The Roman Catholic Church, with the bishop of Rome serving as the patriarch of the West, is one of them.

Dating back no earlier perhaps than the 15th century, the Roman Catholic Church, being Roman, and a product of the Roman, imperial culture, this Roman Church couldn't help making itself a Church of laws, and an imperial Church as well, one that felt the need to conquer other cultures -- all over the world.

This is the Church we think of today as "the Church" or "the Roman Catholic Church." It is still just one of 21 home-grown Churches, but here it is today, burdened and weighed down with a top-down kind of unaccountable governance that impedes its Jesus-witness in a bottom-up world.

My mentors, my theologian friends, have all but given up the idea that Rome can reform. They wonder why we can't we have home-grown, enculturated, autochthonous Churches of the people everywhere.

The very presence of these autochthonous Churches under the Catholic umbrella may threaten Rome's micromanagement of the Catholic universe, but the autochthonous Churches illustrate and celebrate a very human aspect of the Church: it is different in different lands, part of the local culture, and emblematic of the freedom our faith should give us. We do not have to all march in lockstep.

A modern autochthonous Church is not an unthinkable idea. The ecumenically-minded Belgian Cardinal Mercier thought of it in 1925, when he proposed at his Malines Conversations that the Anglican Church be united with Rome as an

autochthonous Church, with the Archbishop of Canterbury serving as the patriarch of England, with its own married priests, its own English language liturgy, and its own Book of Common Prayer. Pope Pius XI squelched Cardinal Mercier's idea and even wrote an encyclical, *Mortalium animos*, condemning the ecumenical movement itself, which remained as Church policy until the eve of Vatican II.

But the idea of a modern autochthonous Church hung on. In 1959, a young Joseph Ratzinger wrote a paper suggesting that autochthony might be useful "particularly in missionary lands." Maybe he was thinking of China, which already had a measure of autochthony by selecting its own bishops without reference to Rome. At the Asian Synod in Rome, in 1998, the Indonesia Bishops Conference (which had requested Rome's permission to start ordaining married men and was turned down, at least twice) proposed that the Church in Indonesia become autochthonous. The synod ignored their proposal, but the Indonesia bishops came back again in another Rome synod in 2001, and made the same request. It was ignored again, probably because the organizers of the pope's synod in the Roman Curia could not wrap their minds around the new idea, that a local Church like the Church in Indonesia could be Indonesian and still Catholic.

It's too bad that Martin Luther knew nothing of autochthony. If he had seen it as an option, he would not have had to start his own Church in Germany. His people could have had their own married priests and their own German Bible and their own liturgies in German. They could have become autochthonous, that is, more German and less Roman.

I am suggesting that the time is right for Irish Catholics to take one more step on the path to freedom, this time freedom from Ireland's Roman colonizers. As citizens of Ireland, you have been through the process of becoming a republic. As citizens of the Church, you can go through the process of becoming a home-grown Church work in Ireland. How might that work?

You can demand the Irish bishops get the hell out of your cathedrals (your cathedrals, not their cathedrals) while you elect your own bishops to limited terms of office. Yes, you can start by electing your own bishops, as they do now in some Swiss cantons. You may decide to keep your present bishops, the good ones. The bad bishops are so caught up in their purple, aristocratic culture that they cannot read the signs of the times. For the past 40 years, no amount of lobbying, no

number of petitions by the world's largest lay organizations, no brilliant theological persuasion has moved a single lord bishop to become a servant bishop.

Your elected bishops would be accountable to you, not the pope. They would serve the people as listeners not lords, and meet periodically in a Senate of Bishops alongside the elected members of a separate House of the People. Both bodies, the Senate of Bishops and the House of the People, will check and balance each other. They will conduct the business of your Irish Church not in private but in open sessions with press and broadcast coverage, making them accountable to the people who elected them, not to the pope.

You can elect your own representatives to every diocesan board and commission and committee, particularly the finance committees, which will all have active, not merely an advisory voice. You could have similar elections to every committee in every parish, whose parishioners will select their own pastors from a list of priest candidates. You can take care of the so called priest shortage by finally admitting that women are not "defective males" according to the scientific analysis of St Thomas Aquinas, and recognize that in your home grown Irish Church, you can ordain anyone whom God calls to ministry in the Church.

You could write a constitution that makes these moves mandatory, by consent of the governed. And, while you are at it, you would make some provision for two other branches of Church governance: 1) for courts, including a supreme court (because, wherever men and woman gather, disputes arise that must be settled by a refereed dialogue), and 2) for the election of a president or chief operating officer who will head the executive branch of your Irish Church--because the buck always has to stop somewhere.

You will still have bishops, but they will be your own elected bishops, accountable in a Church of, by and for the people--even young people who may come flocking back to the Church once they realize they have a voice and a vote and citizenship in their own Church.

Can you help create a people's Church? YES! You can if you want to. In this context, I like to quote Pope John Paul II. In 1978, he traveled to Warsaw and told millions of Poles, "You can take back your country if you demand it." You can say the same thing. "We can take back our Church if we demand it."

I have heard only one objection to this plan -- that it is "unlikely to happen." But long odds are no objection to a good idea. In 1978, who would have thought that the Polish people could take back their country from the mighty occupying army of the Soviet Union? But they did it. They won their battle.

We face long odds in the battle for our own home-grown Churches - against the thousand-year-old entrenched power of the Vatican. But if our cause is just, then long odds shouldn't stop us. It is fun betting against the odds, and even more fun when we finally win a battle that no one expected us to win.

Let me tell you a story about fighting against long odds. In the late 1800s, in the United States, almost one hundred years after our Declaration of Independence from England, women still did not have the right to vote. So a small group of American women launched a campaign with the U.S. Congress to amend the U.S. Constitution. Conservative Southern senators opposed them. But that didn't stop these intrepid women. If they couldn't get to the U.S. Senate, they decided to go to the leaders of our 48 states, an infinitely more painful route that ultimately worked. But not until they had given many a speech and made many a demonstration and been thrown into many a jail. They launched 480 campaigns to get state legislatures to submit voting rights amendments to their people, 47 campaigns to get constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions; 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include planks in their platforms that included the right for a woman to vote; 30 campaigns to get the political parties to include similar planks in their party platforms and 19 campaigns with 19 successive Congresses. Until finally - in 1920 - they got their right to vote enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. That fight took twenty years.

Will the battle for a home-grown Catholic Church in Ireland take twenty years? I doubt it. This mass-mediated, Internet world we live in spins very fast. If this is an idea whose time has come, then the Holy Spirit will make it happen. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through history. The current ongoing history of the sex scandal -- and the news about our crumbling, abuse-of-authority Church -- may tell us that change is already happening, happening faster than anyone thinks.

I can see some of you smiling. This is a very Utopian idea, isn't it? Well, maybe not. I'd like to remind you that the revolution may have already started - in Ireland—by an 80-year-old grandmother in Cork named Jennifer Sleeman. According to a news story by Patsy McGarry in the *Irish Times* just a few days ago, Mrs. Sleeman,

whose son is a monk, organized an one-day boycott of Sunday Mass on September 26 by the faithful women and mothers of Ireland "to let the Vatican and the Irish Church know that women are tired of being treated as second-class citizens."

Ms. Sleeman told McGarry, "Somehow I have grown up and the Church has not. It seems caught in a time-warp, run by celibate old men divorced from the reality of life, with a lonely priesthood struggling with the burden of celibacy where rules and regulations have more weight than the original message of community and love."

Maybe this grandmother from Cork has already started the revolution. She obviously believes what I believe, that you can have a voice and a vote in your own Church, and still be Catholic and, at the same time, Irish. Like all revolutions, the struggle won't be easy. You will have to find some creative leadership, take a thousand bold steps, have many a meeting, organize many a boycott, withhold many a Euro from the Sunday collection, give many a speech, and shed many a tear.

But I have every reason to believe you can take back your Church, your Church, not the pope's Church, your Church, not your bishop's Church. You have what it takes. You have staying power. You understand and enjoy politics. You believe politics is an honorable profession. And you have your smiling Irish eyes, your impish sense of humor, your great gift of the gab, and poetry in your souls.

You also have the intelligence and the leadership of your beautiful women. Don't forget them. The Vatican doesn't have many of them.