

CHRISTMAS MESSAGE 1990

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Primate of All Ireland

Two elements lie close to the Christian meaning of Christmas - love and hope.

The love of God for this world was seen in the birth of His son to homeless parents in a stable. Their love for the child Jesus was the love of devoted parents who were involved in the mystery of the creation of a defenceless and vulnerable child and yet a child already destined to become the Saviour of the world. This was God's intervention in the world : a world full of division, suspicion and misunderstanding. This was the eternal evidence of God's love for the world He had made. This was the basis and truth of the hope which is at the centre of the Christian Gospel.

This Christmas little has changed in the world in which we celebrate the coming of Christ. We are surrounded by suspicion, uncertainty and suffering. We see evidence throughout the globe of man's inhumanity to man and we are reminded in so many ways of the burden so many carry because of human suffering, injustice and the threat of conflict.

As we think of the love and hope of that first Christmas Christians throughout the world pray for peace. We pray that diplomatic efforts for a settlement in the Middle East will prevent the world being plunged into a war which could produce suffering and destruction on a scale few can imagine. We pray that more can be done to relieve the suffering of the hungry and the homeless who cling so desperately to life in parts of the world which present such a contrast to the wealth and apparent security of the affluent nations. We pray for greater understanding of human dignity where human rights are ignored and life is so cheap.

In our own community that same message of love and hope cries out to be heard and to be understood. Northern Ireland yearns for peace and stability. The wounds of violence are to be found in each of our communities. Reconciliation is much more than a word we use to express some vague notion of what we think ought to happen. Reconciliation is the essential priority of our time. Too many families face this Christmas burdened by the scars of division and the loss of a loved one through violence.

I have been greatly encouraged by the courage and determination of so many in this community who are working for greater understanding. Their work and their witness shine out as beacons of hope for the future. Their lives are such a contrast to the lives of those who bring death and destruction, and to those who believe they must go on re-enforcing division and suspicion. Those who are reaching out to others with love and understanding are the real peace-makers : their work lies so close to the heart of God.

The answer to the needs of the world remains for the Christian the love and hope of Christ. That is the essential Christian meaning of Christmas. It is also the only relevant and lasting message for the future. It is the message Ireland needs to hear again and again. It is the only message which can make sense out of the present and bring lasting hope for the future.

May God grant that in our hearts and minds we may see and having seen, we may understand, what the real message of Christmas can be for this world.
