

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY MR KEITH WARNOCK, National University of Ireland, Galway, on 27 June 2003 on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on ARCHBISHOP JOHN R. NEILL**

A Sheánsailéar, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle:

John Neill was born into a family with a long history of service in the ministry of the Church of Ireland. Following his primary and secondary education in Dublin he entered Trinity College to study Hebrew and Oriental Languages. He was elected a Foundation Scholar in 1965 and was awarded a first class honours degree in 1966. He received a Robert Gardiner scholarship to study theology in Cambridge, where he was awarded his MA in 1972.

John Neill was ordained deacon in 1969 and priest in 1970, becoming the fourth generation of his family to enter the ministry. After several years as a curate in Glenageary he went to Kilkenny in 1971 as Bishop's Vicar, Librarian and Diocesan Registrar of St. Canice's Cathedral. He moved in 1974 to the Diocese of Ross, ministering for four years as Rector in Skibbereen. He returned to Dublin as incumbent of St. Bartholomew's and Leeson Park, and during his time there he was a Lecturer in Liturgy in the School of Theology in Trinity.

John Neill became Dean of Waterford in 1984, and two years later was elected Bishop of Tuam, Killala and Achonry. For eleven years, we were extraordinarily fortunate to have him as a member of the Governing Body of University College Galway. He filled this role with great commitment, always there for meetings of the main body and of the many committees on which he served; more importantly, he has been described as an exceptional member who was always ready to offer a comment and brought to the discussions a different and most valuable view.

Not long after his election to Tuam, Bishop Neill was called upon to play a significant role in relation to one of the most potentially divisive of issues, the ordination of women. Not for the first time, the ability and integrity of a Bishop from the numerically insignificant Church of Ireland was recognised at the international level of the Anglican Communion when Bishop Neill was appointed chairman of the Group on Women in the Episcopate at the Lambeth Conference of 1988. It is surely a measure of his qualities (both spiritual and temporal) that he so successfully limited the potential for division and was the proposer of all of the resolutions in this area that the Conference approved. Not surprisingly, this involvement at the international level was followed by a significant contribution to the debate within the Church of Ireland itself, and Bishop Neill was Chairman of the General Synod Committee on the

enthusiastic speech”, he proposed the resulting Bill at the General Synod, where the choice was overwhelmingly in favour of the ordination of women. It seems a fitting personal outcome of these historical developments in the Church of Ireland that his daughter-in-law, married to Stephen (the fifth generation of the family in the ministry), is Reverend Nicola Harvey-Neill.

During his time in Tuam, Bishop Neill began to play a major role in the development of ecumenical relationships. He was President of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland from 1990 to 1994, and has been a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches since 1994. His other contributions included the leading of a British/Irish Church delegation to Yugoslavia in 1993.

In 1997 John Neill was elected Bishop of Cashel and Ossory, and continued to contribute to ecumenical work while carrying out his episcopal and pastoral duties. In 1998, he became co-chairman of the Porvoo Contact Group, linking Anglican with Lutheran churches in Nordic and Baltic countries; he was also President of 'Churches Together' in Britain and Ireland from 1999 to 2002. In August 2002 John Neill was elected Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough, an appointment that was no surprise to those who know him or have followed his work.

For me there is a particular delight in knowing what pleasure it would have given my late father-in-law, a former Archbishop of Dublin, to see the Church of Ireland, in the person of a man in whose development he took such a deep interest, so honoured by the National University of Ireland in Galway today. We wish him well in his new office, confident that the personal and intellectual qualities we saw when he made his contribution to this university will sustain him in his new responsibilities. Above all, we honour today a distinguished scholar and churchman whose ecumenism and commitment to inclusiveness, while continuing a long tradition, seem particularly appropriate for the first Church of Ireland Archbishop to be elected in the twenty-first century.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

*Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.*