

HUMBOLDT-REDE ZU EUROPA DER PRÄSIDENTIN DER REPUBLIK IRLAND, MARY McALEESE

What substantial contribution can a church historian, who occupies the office of university president, make to the greeting of a state president, who is a lawyer by training, who was Reid-professor for Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College and who was pro-Vice Chancellor of the Queen's University in Belfast, before becoming a journalist and presenter and subsequently a close advisor to the Irish Catholic Bishops? What contribution indeed? While a German church historian may know a little about the penance book of the Irish monks, he has to accede that modern criminal law in Ireland deals far more liberally with sinners than the pre-modern, draconian rules of those peregrinate, with whom Ireland once colonised the desert of Germania. My sketchy knowledge of the Irish university system, moreover, gives me the feeling that a veritable pro-Vice Chancellor has far more influence than a German university president, whose space for manoeuvre is severely limited by the legal system, the ever-lacking finances and the various committees. What is more, while the president of Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin does occasionally appear in the press, on the radio or television, he has never been asked to be a presenter a television or radio program himself – probably for very good reasons. And finally, my influence on the Catholic Bishops of Germany can only, if described by a neutral observer, be portrayed as marginal; the current chairman of the German Bishop's conference happens to be interested in church fathers and has therefore occasionally listened to my humble opinion, but now that he has been forced to resign from his post due to ill health I fear that this episode is also at an end.

But why am I telling you all of this? I am doing so in order to illustrate with a few drastic formulations, that your biography, dear Mary McAleese, impresses us here in Berlin almost as much as your visit moves us. In Germany, there is, to quote the German poet Lessing, a »nastily broad rift« between academia and politics; intellectuals look down on politicians and vice versa. Everyone here will be able to recount an anecdote about professors who have failed in politics and about former politicians who tried to become professors (in Harvard for example) but who were hardly taken any notice of. There is of course no reason to be proud of this German tradition or to introduce it to the common

European house. Indeed, we are justified to ask the question whether the catastrophes in German twentieth century history were not conditioned or at least influenced by the experiences of estrangement between politics and academia – I am referring to the apolitical professor who let that pass which the politician wanted to be passed, an approach that applied to German intellectuals generally before they regained consciousness: Thomas Mann hence named one of his most famous essays (completed just before the End of the First World War) the *Observations of an Apolitical Man*.

Dear Mary McAleese, you are the best example for illustrating how much responsibility the professor bears for politics, for the creation of parochial roots for the European idea and for the specification and dissemination of European concepts, just like the university as a whole has to take responsibility for these fields. Here at Humboldt-Universität, there are already manifold activities which are heading in this direction, among which those of Professor Pernice are the most successful and most visible – but we do not want to stop there. We are pursuing the creation of a European lecture course, which is designed to investigate European values in modules and which is to base its teaching on the principles of the Bologna process. But while all that still has to be realised, we are now delighted to have among us as an example that shows us where an academic can be lead by her enthusiasm for the European idea and welcome you to Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.