



UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
HONORARY CONFERRING
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TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **DR PÁDRAIC CONWAY**, Vice-President for University Relations, University College Dublin on 16 June 2009, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa* on **JOHN JOSEPH COLLINS**

A Uachtaráin agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

"No peace among the nations
without peace among the religions.
No peace among the religions
without dialogue between the religions
No dialogue between the religions
without investigation of the foundation of the religions."

The words of Hans Kung, taken from his book *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* serve as a fitting introduction today to our citation of one of the foremost scholars of the foundational texts of two world religions, Judaism and Christianity.

Professor John Collins is an outstanding UCD graduate with a 1967 B.A. and a 1969 M.A. in Semitics and Classics. He is, literally, at the top of the world in his field of ancient apocalyptic writings and particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls. Since graduating from this university and beginning his academic career here as an Assistant Lecturer in the early 1970s, he has had a highly distinguished career in the United States, holding Chairs at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Chicago before taking up his present position at Yale, where he is Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation.

John Collins is rightly regarded as the leading expert in the field of near-eastern apocalyptic writings and he has made an invaluable contribution to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. His publication list is, needless to say, highly impressive. In addition to well over two-hundred articles in peer-reviewed journals, various encyclopaedia contributions, and offerings in edited collections, there are twenty monographs covering a wide range of topics in his chosen field. He is co-editor of the three-volume *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* and of the forthcoming *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls*. He is editor of the prestigious journal *Dead Sea Discoveries* and also serves as editor of a prestigious academic monograph series from Brill Publishers, entitled *Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements*.

His work is marked by the thoroughness of his research and the clarity of his presentations, and has consistently received outstanding reviews from his peers. This esteem is reflected in the fact that he has served as President of both The Society for Biblical Literature and the Catholic Biblical Association of America.

It among the main contributions that John has made as a biblical scholar and historian of religion to encourage us to see the biblical text as the product of a particular time and place, rooted in the history, archaeology and literature of the Ancient Near East. In his work on the relationship between biblical interpretation and theology, he advocates an approach of dialogue and cross-fertilisation between the two distinct disciplines. He recalls Newman's espousal of versatility of intellect when suggesting that the plurality within both contemporary biblical scholarship and systematic theology means that any such dialogue must be characterised by the celebration of diversity rather than any quest for unity. His overall approach has been characterised as combining a lucid and detailed exposition of primary texts – where fluency in five ancient and at least as many current languages is merely an entry ticket – with responsible interaction with the best of current scholarship. This approach leads to balanced conclusions which distinguish clearly between speculation, possibility and probability.

John continues to be deeply interested in Irish academic affairs. He has been unfailingly helpful to young Irish scholars coming to the USA. He has contributed to several of the colloquia held under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy's Committee for the Bible and the near East and has been willing to act as referee for various academic proposals by Irish Universities over the years.

Most recently, his continuing commitment to Irish biblical scholarship saw him address the annual meeting of the Irish Biblical Association at the end of April. By a stroke of providence that was almost divine in its origins, if not its final outcome, this enabled John to indulge another of his great passions and attend the National Hurling League Final between his beloved Tipperary and Kilkenny. Alas, the result that day in the home of hurling, when combined with the defeat the previous day of his other great sporting love, Munster rugby, meant that John's experience of apocalypse, as popularly understood, that weekend was not confined to his scholarly inputs at the IBA!

It is our privilege today to honour one of our own. John Collins is an outstanding UCD graduate and former colleague who has gone on to be a true world-leader. He has worked a lifetime in a discipline where various shades of misinterpretation have given us the vulgarities of *The Da Vinci Code* or, much more seriously, the centuries of vilifying-the-other-to-define-the-self which has been all too prominent in the history of those religions emanating from the Ancient Near East. In honouring him today, we are sounding a note of hope, one which both affirms the intrinsic value of excellent scholarship and asserts the possibility of a future more characterised by that peace among nations which will be grounded on better mutual understanding of our shared origins.

Praehonorabilis Praeses, 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 Litteris; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.