















# The Eucharistic Congress 1932

## The Eucharistic Congress

1. An international Catholic religious festival bringing together clergy, religious and laity from all over the world.
2. The 31<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Congress was held in Dublin in 1932 to celebrate the 1,500 year anniversary of St. Patrick's arrival in Ireland.
3. The Congress was the idea of the Cumann na nGaedheal government but took place after Fianna Fail won the 1932 General Election.

## The Events of the Congress

1. July 1932 saw the new Irish State entertain thousands of churchmen who came from all over the world for the 31<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Congress.
2. There were incredible scenes of devotion and a papal mass in the Phoenix Park
3. A live papal broadcast from Rome.
4. It was felt to be a milestone for all who attended it.

## The Congress Demonstrated

1. The importance of the Catholic religion.
2. The close relationship between politicians and the Catholic Church.
3. The confidence of the new state as it deployed its resources to provide a spectacular occasion.
4. The monolithic nature of Catholicism - the implications for minority groups such as Protestants and for relations with Protestant-dominated north.

## Importance for Free State

1. Ireland sought to organise a Congress to be even more impressive than the previous one in Chicago.
2. City of Dublin underwent makeover for purposes of international publicity and celebration. Spotlights, illuminations, decorations show enormous effort in planning and preparing for event.
4. Employment of largest PA system of sound to broadcast the mass, the papal message and hymns of John McCormack.

## Importance of Catholicism to Ireland

1. Catholics 93% of population following partition; Protestant-dominated north is separate.
2. Catholic Church hierarchy saw chance to make a Catholic state; it was in a homogeneous state in which the Church could impart social and moral stability.
3. Politicians wanted to build a state that would reflect Catholic values which almost everyone shared.
4. Independent Ireland could assert independence of England as the dominant Protestant power.
5. Catholicism was a binding force unifying Ireland after the scars of the divisions caused by the Civil War.
6. It demonstrated that the collective loyalty of the Irish people was to the Catholicism although the Constitution of 1922 forbade the government from giving privilege to any one faith over another
7. It paved the way for the Constitution of 1937.
8. Catholic Church has enormous impact on society in many ways: the running of hospitals, schools, orphanages etc as well as missionary efforts overseas and help for the poor.

## Church and Politics

1. The organisation of the Eucharistic Congress involved both Cosgrave and deValera
2. De Valera's speech emphasised the persecution the Irish had suffered for Catholicism. Politicians share a platform with clergymen.
3. The Catholic Church "forgets" about the condemnation of Civil War violence and the excommunication of de Valera and co-operates with politicians.
4. The influence of John Charles McQuaid - later Bishop of Dublin
5. This close relationship was evident in the legislation of the period, for example: The Intoxicating Liquor Act 1924, Censorship of Films Act 1923, Censorship of Publications Act 1929, The Criminal Law Amendment Act (banning contraceptives), The Public Dance halls Act and 1937 Constitution.

## Divisions

1. It was repugnant to northern Protestant identity because of the stress on Catholic infallibility which clashed with Protestant regard for the conscience of the individual.
2. It showed the need for a border in many Protestant eyes. There were attacks on northern Catholics coming south for the occasion.
3. Southern Protestants felt that this was an expression of Catholic triumphalism that emphasised their minority status.

## Other Examples of Cultural Identity

1. The emphasis on the Irish language in education, official documents etc.
2. Emergence of a new art focuses on the quintessential Ireland of the west - Paul Henry, Sean Keating etc, and the poetry of Yeats.
3. The imagery of the new State was Irish inasmuch as all the symbols had significance - the flag, the stamps, the coinage etc.