



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE REPRESENTATIVES
OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY***

Sydney (Australia), 26 November 1986

1. Earlier this year, I had the pleasure and privilege of visiting the Synagogue in Rome and of speaking with the Rabbis and the assembled congregation. At that time I gave "thanks and praise to the Lord who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth and who chose Abraham in order to make him the father of a multitude of children, as numerous 'as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the sea shore'". I gave thanks and praise to him because it had been his good pleasure, in the mystery of his providence, that the meeting was taking place. Today, I praise and thank him again because he has brought me, in this great Southern land, into the company of another group of Abraham's descendants, a group which is representative of many Jewish people in Australia. May he bless you and make you strong for his service!

2. It is my understanding that, although the experience of Jews in Australia - an experience going right back to the beginning of white settlement in 1788 - has not been without its measure of sorrow, prejudice and discrimination, it has included more civil and religious freedom than was to be found in many of the countries of the Old World. At the same time, this is still the century of the Shoah, the inhuman and ruthless attempt to exterminate European Jewry; and I know that Australia has given asylum and a new home to thousands of refugees and survivors from that ghastly series of events. To them in particular I say, as I said to your brothers and sisters, the Jews of Rome, "the Church, in the words of the well known Declaration Nostra Aetate, 'deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and by anyone'".

3. My hope for this meeting is that it will help to consolidate and extend the improved relations you already have with members of the Catholic community in this country. I know that there are men and women throughout Australia, Jews and Catholics alike, who are working, as I stated at the

Synagogue in Rome, "to overcome old prejudices and to secure ever wider and fuller recognition of that 'bond' and that 'common spiritual patrimony' that exists between Jews and Christians". I give thanks to God for this.

4. Where Catholics are concerned, it will continue to be an explicit and very important part of my mission to repeat and emphasize that our attitude to the Jewish religion should be one of the greatest respect, since the Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham. We, too, gratefully hold these same truths of our Jewish heritage, and look upon you as our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

For the Jewish people themselves, Catholics should have not only respect but also great fraternal love; for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God who has called them with an irrevocable calling. No valid theological justification could ever be found for acts of discrimination or persecution against Jews. In fact, such acts must be held to be sinful.

5. In order to be frank and sincere we must recognize the fact that there are still obvious differences between us, in religious belief and practice. The most fundamental difference is in our respective views on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing however prevents us from true and fraternal cooperation in many worthy enterprises, such as biblical studies and numerous works of justice and charity. Such combined undertakings can bring us ever closer together in friendship and trust.

Through the Law and the Prophets, we, like you, have been taught to put a high value on human life and on fundamental and inalienable human rights. Today, human life, which should be held sacred from the moment of conception, is being threatened in many different ways. Violations of human rights are widespread. This makes it all the more important for all people of good will to stand together to defend life, to defend the freedom of religious belief and practice, and to defend all other fundamental human freedoms.

6. Finally, I am sure we agree that, in a secularized society, there are many widely held values which we cannot accept. In particular, consumerism and materialism are often presented, especially to the young, as the answers to human problems. I express my admiration for the many sacrifices you have made to operate religious schools for your children, in order to help them evaluate the world around them from the perspective of faith in God. As you know, Australian Catholics have done the same. In secularized society, such institutions are always likely to be attacked for one reason or another. Since Catholics and Jews value them for the same reasons, let us work together whenever possible in order to protect and promote the religious instruction of our children. In this way we can bear common witness to the Lord of all.

7. Mr President and Members of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, I thank you once again

for this meeting, and I give praise and thanks to the Lord in the words of the Psalmist:

"Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love towards us; and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever. Praise the Lord!"

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