



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr Edward John Stevens,
AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRALIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Saturday, 11 January 1997

Mr Ambassador,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Australian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I am grateful for the good wishes you bring from the Government and people of Australia. These cordial greetings remind me of the warm welcome which I received during my second visit to your country in early 1995, when I had the pleasure of beatifying that outstanding Australian woman, Mother Mary MacKillop. At that time I was able once more to experience the openness and hospitality to strangers for which your fellow-countrymen are rightly esteemed.

Your presence today enables me to acknowledge Australia's active role in providing aid to developing nations and assistance to those suffering from the effects of war and political unrest. In the closing years of this century, calamitous situations, in particular the immense tragedy unfolding in the Great Lakes area of Africa, challenge all those committed to justice and peace to redouble their efforts to alleviate so much pain and suffering. The destitution of countless millions is an affront to human dignity and a continuing threat to world peace.

Your Excellency has noted that among the urgent problems facing the international community is the continuing tragedy of hunger and malnutrition. The recent World Food Summit in Rome focused attention on the grave situation of the more than eight hundred million people in developing countries who are ravaged by malnutrition or the consequences of food insecurity. Sadly, the scourge of hunger persists despite scientific and technological advances capable of increasing agricultural production and providing sufficient food for everyone. While the reasons for this are many and complex, we cannot ignore the fact that any effective response must be linked to broader questions of development, including the need to ensure that developing countries have fair access to the resources, technology and the education that can make progress possible. Authentic development requires not only prudent economic measures but also a commitment to

solidarity in promoting the integral good of individuals and peoples, with due respect for the ethical imperatives which alone can guarantee just and equitable relationships between them. In this regard, the developed nations must seriously examine their stewardship of the world's resources and make increasing efforts to guarantee the universal right to nutrition.

Certainly one of the most promising signs of our times has been an increasing desire on the part of the international community to co-operate in finding ways to eradicate poverty from the human family. Solutions to this problem will not however be found in policies and programmes which, by fostering and even imposing a model of life not in harmony with peoples' culture and traditions, undermine fundamental human rights (cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, n. 25). The fact that the earth must be a home to everyone calls for a spirit of co-operation and sharing which respects the legitimate differences of individuals and peoples. The advancement of human dignity also requires a clear sense of the transcendent moral truths which must direct political choices and integrate particular interests within the framework of a coherent vision of the common good (cf. *Centesimus annus*, n. 47).

In fulfilling her spiritual mission, the Church endeavours to heighten awareness of the inalienable dignity and inviolability of every human being, including the unborn, the handicapped, the elderly and the terminally ill. Absolutely essential to any system of values worthy of man is the fundamental right to life itself. Any action or omission which directly and deliberately causes the death of an innocent person is a grave violation of the law written in the human heart. The Catholic Church in Australia seeks to defend this fundamental truth when it speaks forthrightly against attempts to legitimize requests for euthanasia or to authorize it (cf. *Evangelium vitae*, n. 72). It is my prayer that as the Year 2000 approaches Australia will further strengthen its Christian heritage by defending human life and by acting generously and courageously in the service of the poor, the stranger and the defenceless.

In offering my best wishes I take the opportunity to assure you of the assistance which the various departments of the Roman Curia will always be ready to offer you in the fulfilment of your mission. Upon Your Excellency and all Australians I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XX, 1 p. 72-74.

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