



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr. MICHAEL C. TATE
NEW AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRALIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 13 January 1994

Mr. Ambassador,

I am pleased to accept today the Credential Letters by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Australia to the Holy See. Your welcome presence here affords me the opportunity to reaffirm my sentiments of esteem for your nation and my affection for all its people. I would ask you kindly to assure the Government of my good wishes for Australia's peace and prosperity, and to convey to His Excellency the Governor-General and to the Prime Minister my cordial greetings.

I am deeply saddened by reports of the suffering and loss caused by the fires in New South Wales. I will continue to pray for all who are affected by this immense tragedy, asking God in particular to guard the fire-fighters and volunteers who with true practical solidarity have been working so hard to protect the lives and property of their fellow-citizens.

It is by serving ever more generously the cause of justice, peace and reconciliation, both within her national boundaries and abroad, that Australia can realize that "great mission" and "immense capacity for good" to which I bore tribute during [my Pastoral Visit in 1986](#) (John Paul II, [Address at the Airport of Fairbairn](#), 4, 24 November 1986). The dignity of every man and woman which the Church steadfastly proclaims is also a foremost principle of the democratic aspirations of your society. "We speak", as I said in my address to the Parliament at Canberra in 1986, "a common language of respect for the human person" (John Paul II, [Address to the members of the Parliament House in Canberra](#), 3, 24 November 1986). It is here that we find the basis for our cooperation and cordial relations.

A shared conviction regarding human dignity and the rights of every person is the secure foundation upon which to build a truly just and cohesive society. As the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World points out, "the social order and its development must constantly yield to the good of the person, since the order of things must be subordinate to the order of persons and not the other way around" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26). In a democracy, recognition of the inalienable dignity and transcendent destiny of every individual should guide citizens in the use of their freedom, thus helping them to prevent liberty from becoming a pretext for arbitrary licence. Without such a safeguard, the way would be open for a tyranny of the majority - or of those who could manipulate the majority, for "as history demonstrates, a democracy without values easily turns into an open or thinly disguised totalitarianism" (John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 46). The renewed dedication of Australians to the common good, in fidelity to the ideals of their democratic heritage, will help to ensure that in the life of the nation the measure of good government remains principles such as truthfulness, impartiality, solidarity and respect for the rights of all (Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 101).

In the field of international relations, Australia's opposition to armed conflict as a means for solving disputes between nations is an important reference-point for the world community's efforts to meet the challenges of unresolved ethnic and political tensions. The interdependence of nations and of whole areas of the globe is a prominent feature of the present world situation, where the development and peace of each depends upon the well-being of all. Development is indivisible: all have a right to share at the table of the world's resources. This principle is for believers and for all people of good will a summons to ever deeper solidarity, and an encouragement to help less prosperous nations in their efforts to achieve authentic progress.

I note with appreciation your reference to Australia's concern for the rights and needs of its own Indigenous peoples, and your mention of your country's openness to the resettlement of foreign refugees. No individual should be seen merely as the object of assistance. Every human being is the subject of real rights and duties. People's capacity to act on their own behalf must be safeguarded and enhanced. In particular, the tragedy of refugees is increasingly felt today as an attack on essential human dignity (Cf. Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, *Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity*, 1992, n. 11, 35) and, in the international forum, the Holy See is pleased to see its efforts to revive a sometimes flagging interest in the plight of the World's refugees backed or paralleled by other Governments and international agencies. I gladly express the Church's appreciation of Australia's efforts to stimulate international aid and solidarity with people forced into exile.

Your reference to the Servant of God Mary MacKillop reminds us that her life and work are a fine example of the traditional commitment of Australian Catholics to the welfare of their country. With the guarantees of religious liberty contained in the laws of your nation, the Church has been able to devote herself extensively to works of education, health-care and other forms of social service. Religious faith does not produce a theory of social organization but offers a basis and a motivation

for acts of solidarity, especially with the poor and the vulnerable, and for the promotion of justice, including the just distribution of resources (Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 57). "By leading people to a new understanding of their human condition, religious faith brings people, through a sincere gift of themselves, to a complete fellowship with other human beings... [It] brings them together and unites them... it makes them more attentive, more responsible, more generous in their commitment to the common good" (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1988*, 3, 8 December 1987). The Catholic community in Australia remains firm in its commitment to the development and progress of a society which recognizes, defends and promotes the dignity of each person and the value of every human life. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Australia will continue to benefit from the spiritual vision and energies of its people in a context of harmony and mutual respect among all its citizens.

Your Excellency, during your term as your country's Ambassador, the various departments of the Holy See will do all they can to assist you in the discharge of your lofty duties. I offer my own good wishes for your efforts to build further on the already very positive relations between Australia and the Holy See, and I invoke upon you and your loved ones abundant divine blessings.

**Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XVII, 1 p. 83-86.

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