



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR
OF AUSTRALIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday 15 May 2003

Your Excellency,

It is a pleasure for me to extend a cordial welcome to you today as I accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Australia to the Holy See. Though some years ago now, my pastoral visits to your country remain clearly etched in my mind. I especially recall the beatification of Mary MacKillop, that loyal daughter of the Church who, for Australians in particular, has become a model of Christian discipleship. I thank you for the greetings which you bear from the Government and the people of Australia. Please convey to them my sincere best wishes and assure them of my prayers for the peace and well-being of the nation.

The common ideals and human values with which both the Holy See and Australia seek to confront the problems facing humanity today must continue to find resonance even in societies marked by strong individualism and increasing secularism. In this regard, the Holy See's diplomatic mission seeks to present a vision of hope to an increasingly divided world. The Church's commitment to this aim, seen in her defence of the dignity of human life and the promotion of human rights, social justice and solidarity, arises out of the recognition of the common origin of all people and points to their common destiny. In this perspective the transcendent dimension of life works to counter tendencies towards social fragmentation and isolation so sadly prevalent in many societies today.

Solidarity with developing nations is a well known and laudable trait of your people. Involvement of Australians in peace-keeping missions, their generous assistance with aid projects and more recently their support of the newly independent nation of East Timor, all speak well of their desire to contribute to the international security and stability necessary for authentic social and economic

advancement. Drawing on the strength of Australia's many years of sound diplomacy, her emerging role as a leader in the Asia-Pacific region gives your nation the opportunity to become an increasingly important agent of peace for those countries seeking a maturity in international solidarity. This has been particularly noted in the wake of acts of terrorism which tragically shatter the hopes for world peace.

Acts of solidarity are more than just unilateral humanitarian acts of good intent. True humanitarianism recognizes and expresses God's universal plan for humanity. It is only in accord with this vision of worldwide solidarity that the complex challenges of justice, freedom of peoples and the peace of humanity can be effectively addressed (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 48). At the heart of this vision is the belief that all men and women receive their essential and common dignity from God and the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness (cf. *Centesimus Annus* 38). It is in this light that your dialogues and partnerships with those countries north of your continent, which do not share a Christian heritage, will find their proper and stable foundation. Similarly, it is only within this perspective of the essential unity of mankind that the trying difficulties associated with the reception of refugees and with the lingering question of Aboriginal land rights will find compassionate and truly humanitarian solutions.

Your Excellency has observed that tolerance is a further trait of the people of Australia. Indeed this characteristic has endeared many to your land and is reflected in the integration of the multiple ethnic communities now found there. The respect due to all persons does not however find its origin simply in the fact of differences between peoples. From the understanding of the true nature of life as gift stems the requirement that men and women must respect the natural and moral structure with which they have been endowed by God (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 38). While political emphasis on human subjectivity has certainly focused on individual rights, it is sometimes the case that tendencies of "political correctness" seem to neglect that "men and women are called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them" (*Fides et Ratio*, 5). Sundered from that truth, which is the only guarantee of freedom and happiness, individuals are at the mercy of caprice and undifferentiated pluralism, slowly losing the capacity to lift their gaze to the heights of the meaning of human life.

In Australia, as in many other countries, the struggle to interpret choices of lifestyle in relation to God's plan for humanity is manifested in the pressures facing marriage and family life. The sacredness of marriage must be upheld by both religious and civic bodies. Secular and pragmatic distortions of the reality of marriage can never overshadow the splendour of a life-long covenant based on generous self-giving and unconditional love. This splendid vision of marriage and stable family life offers to society as a whole a foundation upon which the aspirations of a nation can be anchored.

For her part the Catholic Church in Australia will continue to provide support for family life, through which the future of humanity passes (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 86). She is already heavily involved

in the spiritual and intellectual formation of the young especially through her schools. Additionally her social apostolate extends to those facing some of the serious problems of modern society – alcohol, drugs, behavioural addiction – and I am confident that the Church will continue to respond generously to new social challenges as they arise.

Your Excellency, I know that your mission will serve to strengthen further the bonds of friendship which already exist between Australia and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfillment of your duties. Upon you, your family and fellow citizens, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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