



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr TIMOTHY ANDREW FISCHER
AMBASSADOR OF AUSTRALIA TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday, 12 February 2009

Mr Ambassador,

It is with particular pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Australia to the Holy See. I would ask you kindly to convey to the Governor-General, Ms Quentin Bryce, and the Government and people of your nation my gratitude for their greetings. With vivid memories of my recent visit to your beautiful country, I assure you of my prayers for the country's well-being and in particular I wish to send my condolences to the grieving individuals and families in Victoria who have lost loved ones in the recent bush fires.

Your Excellency's appointment as Australia's first residential Ambassador to the Holy See marks a welcome new stage in our diplomatic relations and provides an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding and to extend our already significant collaboration. The Church's engagement with civil society is anchored in her conviction that human progress – whether as individuals or communities – is dependent upon the recognition of the supernatural vocation proper to every person. It is from God that men and women receive their essential dignity (cf. *Gen 1:27*) and the capacity to seek truth and goodness. Within this broad perspective we can counter tendencies to pragmatism and consequentialism, so prevalent today, which engage only with the symptoms and effects of conflicts, social fragmentation, and moral ambiguity, rather than their roots. When humanity's spiritual dimension is brought to light, individuals' hearts and minds are drawn to God and to the marvels of human life: being itself, truth, beauty, moral values, and other persons. In this way a sure foundation to unite society and sustain a vision of hope can be found.

World Youth Day was an event of singular importance for the universal Church and for Australia.

Echoes of appreciation continue to resound within your own nation and across the globe. Above all, every [World Youth Day](#) is a spiritual event: a time when young people, not all of whom have a close association with the Church, encounter God in an intense experience of prayer, learning, and listening, thus coming to experience faith in action. Sydney residents themselves, as Your Excellency observed, were inspired by the sheer joy of the pilgrims. I pray that this young generation of Christians in Australia and throughout the world will channel their enthusiasm for all that is true and good into forging friendships across divides and creating places of living faith in and for our world, settings of hope and practical charity.

Mr Ambassador, cultural diversity brings much richness to the social fabric of Australia today. For decades that collage was tarnished by the injustices so painfully endured by the Indigenous Peoples. Through the apology offered last year by Prime Minister Rudd, a profound change of heart has been affirmed. Now, renewed in the spirit of reconciliation, both government agencies and aboriginal elders can address with resolution and compassion the plethora of challenges that lie ahead. A further example of your Government's desire to promote respect and understanding among cultures is its laudable effort to facilitate inter-religious dialogue and cooperation both at home and in the region. Such initiatives help to preserve cultural heritages, nourish the public dimension of religion, and kindle the very values without which civic society's heart would soon wither.

Australia's diplomatic activity in the Pacific, Asia and more recently in Africa is multifaceted and growing. The nation's active support of the Millennium Development Goals, numerous regional partnerships, initiatives to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and keen concern for just economic development are well known and respected. And as the shadows and lights of globalization cast their reach over our world in increasingly complex ways, your nation is showing itself ready to respond to a growing variety of exigencies in a principled, responsible and innovative manner. Not least of these are the menacing threats to God's creation itself through climate change. Perhaps more than ever before in our human history the fundamental relationship between Creator, Creation and Creature needs to be pondered and respected. From this recognition we can discover a common code of ethics, consisting of norms rooted in the natural law inscribed by the Creator on the heart of every human being.

In my [message this year for the World Day of Peace](#), I drew particular attention to the need for an ethical approach to the creation of positive partnerships between markets, civil society and States (cf. no. 12). In this regard I note with interest the Australian Government's determination to establish relations of cooperation based on the values of fairness, good governance, and the sense of a regional neighbourhood. A genuinely ethical stance is at the heart of every responsible, respectful and socially inclusive development policy. It is ethics which render imperative a compassionate and generous response to poverty; they render urgent the sacrificing of protectionist interests for fair accessibility of poor countries to developed markets just as they render reasonable donor nations' insistence upon accountability and transparency in the use of

financial aid by receiver nations.

For her part, the Church has a long tradition within the healthcare sector where she brings to the fore an ethical approach to every individual's particular needs. Especially in poorer nations, Religious Orders and church organizations – including many Australian missionaries – fund and staff a vast network of hospitals and clinics, often in remote areas where States have been unable to serve their own people. Of particular concern is the provision of medical care for families, including high-quality obstetrical care for women. How ironic it is, however, when some groups, through aid programmes, promote abortion as a form of 'maternal' healthcare: taking a life, purportedly to improve the quality of life.

Your Excellency, I am sure that your appointment will further strengthen the bonds of friendship which already exist between Australia and the Holy See. As you exercise your new responsibilities you will find the broad range of offices of the Roman Curia ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you and your family together with your fellow citizens, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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