

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO SYDNEY (AUSTRALIA) ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 23rd WORLD YOUTH DAY
(JULY 12 - 21, 2008)

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER RELIGIONS

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Chapter Hall of St. Mary's Cathedral, Sydney
Friday, 18 July 2008

Dear Friends,

I extend cordial greetings of peace and goodwill to all of you who are here representing various religious traditions in Australia. Grateful for this encounter, I thank Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence and Sheikh Mohamadu Saleem for the words of welcome which they expressed in their own name and on behalf of your respective communities.

Australia is renowned for the congeniality of its people towards neighbour and visitor alike. It is a nation that holds freedom of religion in high regard. Your country recognizes that a respect for this fundamental right gives men and women the latitude to worship God according to their conscience, to nurture their spirits, and to act upon the ethical convictions that stem from their beliefs.

A harmonious relationship between religion and public life is all the more important at a time when some people have come to consider religion as a cause of division rather than a force for unity. In a world threatened by sinister and indiscriminate forms of violence, the unified voice of religious people urges nations and communities to resolve conflicts through peaceful means and with full regard for human dignity. One of the many ways religion stands at the service of mankind is by offering a vision of the human person that highlights our innate aspiration to live generously, forging bonds of friendship with our neighbours. At their core, human relations cannot be defined in terms of power, domination and self-interest. Rather, they reflect and perfect man's natural inclination to live in communion and accord with others.

The religious sense planted within the human heart opens men and women to God and leads them to discover that personal fulfilment does not consist in the selfish gratification of ephemeral desires. Rather, it leads us to meet the needs of others and to search for concrete ways to contribute to the common good. Religions have a special role in this regard, for they teach people that authentic service requires sacrifice and self-discipline, which in turn must be cultivated through self-denial, temperance and a moderate use of the world's goods. In this way, men and women are led to regard the environment as a

marvel to be pondered and respected rather than a commodity for mere consumption. It is incumbent upon religious people to demonstrate that it is possible to find joy in living simply and modestly, generously sharing one's surplus with those suffering from want.

Friends, these values, I am sure you will agree, are particularly important to the adequate formation of young people, who are so often tempted to view life itself as a commodity. They also have an aptitude for self-mastery: indeed, in sports, the creative arts, and in academic studies, they readily welcome it as a challenge. Is it not true that when presented with high ideals, many young people are attracted to asceticism and the practice of moral virtue through self-respect and a concern for others? They delight in contemplating the gift of creation and are intrigued by the mystery of the transcendent. In this regard, both faith schools and State schools could do even more to nurture the spiritual dimension of every young person. In Australia, as elsewhere, religion has been a motivating factor in the foundation of many educational institutions, and rightly it continues to occupy a place in school curricula today. The theme of education frequently emerges from the deliberations of the Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony, and I warmly encourage those participating in this initiative to continue the conversation about the values that integrate the intellectual, human and religious dimensions of a sound education.

The world's religions draw constant attention to the wonder of human existence. Who can help but marvel at the power of the mind to grasp the secrets of nature through scientific discovery? Who is not stirred by the possibility of forming a vision for the future? Who is not impressed by the power of the human spirit to set goals and to develop ways of achieving them? Men and women are endowed with the ability not only to imagine how things might be better, but to invest their energies to make them better. We are conscious of our unique relationship to the natural realm. If, then, we believe that we are not subject to the laws of the material universe in the same way as the rest of creation, should we not make goodness, compassion, freedom, solidarity, and respect for every individual an essential part of our vision for a more humane future?

Yet religion, by reminding us of human finitude and weakness, also enjoins us not to place our ultimate hope in this passing world. Man is "like a breath, his days are like a passing shadow" (*Ps* 144:4). All of us have experienced the disappointment of falling short of the good we wish to accomplish and the difficulty of making the right choice in complex situations.

The Church shares these observations with other religions. Motivated by charity, she approaches dialogue believing that the true source of freedom is found in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe it is he who fully discloses the human potential for virtue and goodness, and he who liberates us from sin and darkness. The universality of human experience, which transcends all geographical boundaries and cultural limitations, makes it possible for followers of religions to engage in dialogue so as to grapple with the mystery of life's joys and sufferings. In this regard, the Church eagerly seeks opportunities to listen to the spiritual experience of other religions. We could say that all religions aim to penetrate the profound meaning of human existence by linking it to an

origin or principle outside itself. Religions offer an attempt to understand the cosmos as coming from and returning to this origin or principle. Christians believe that God has revealed this origin and principle in Jesus, whom the Bible refers to as the “Alpha and Omega” (cf. *Rev* 1:8; 22:1).

My dear friends, I have come to Australia as an ambassador of peace. For this reason, I feel blessed to meet you who likewise share this yearning and the desire to help the world attain it. Our quest for peace goes hand in hand with our search for meaning, for it is in discovering the truth that we find the sure road to peace (cf. *Message for World Day of Peace, 2006*). Our effort to bring about reconciliation between peoples springs from, and is directed to, that truth which gives purpose to life. Religion offers peace, but more importantly, it arouses within the human spirit a thirst for truth and a hunger for virtue. May we encourage everyone – especially the young – to marvel at the beauty of life, to seek its ultimate meaning, and to strive to realize its sublime potential!

With these sentiments of respect and encouragement, I commend you to the providence of Almighty God, and I assure you of my prayers for you and your loved ones, the members of your communities, and all the citizens of Australia.

© Copyright 2008 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana