



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CANADA MEETING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES

OF THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II *Dade County, Miami*

Friday, 11 September 1987

Dear Friends, Representatives of so many Jewish organizations

assembled here from across the United States. My dear Jewish Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am grateful to you for your kind words of greeting. I am indeed pleased to be with you, especially at this time when *the United States tour of the Vatican Judaica Collection begins*. The wonderful material, including illuminated Bibles and prayer books, demonstrates but a small part of the immense spiritual resources of Jewish tradition across the centuries and up to the present time—spiritual resources often used in fruitful cooperation with Christian artists. It is Sitting at the beginning of our meeting *to emphasize our faith in the One God*, who chose Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and made with them a Covenant of eternal love, which was never revoked (Cfr. *Gen. 27, 12; Rom. 11, 29*). It was rather confirmed by the gift of the *Torah* to Moses, opened by the prophets to the hope of eternal redemption and to the universal commitment for justice and peace. The Jewish people, the Church and all believers in the Merciful God – who is invoked in the Jewish prayers as *'Av Ha-Rakhamîm* – can find in this fundamental Covenant with the Patriarchs *a very substantial starting point for our dialogue and our common witness in the world*. It is also fitting *to recall God's promise to Abraham and the spiritual fraternity which it established*: "in your descendants all the nations shall find blessing – all this because you obeyed my command" (*Gen. 22, 18*). This spiritual fraternity, linked to obedience to God, requires *a great mutual respect* in humility and confidence. An objective consideration of our relations during the centuries must take into account this great need. 2. It is indeed worthy of note that the United States was founded by people who came to these shores, often as religious refugees. They aspired to being treated justly and to being accorded hospitality according to the word of God, as we read in Leviticus: "You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God" (*Lev. 19, 34*). Among these millions of immigrants there was a large number of Catholics and Jews. The same *basis religious principles* of freedom and justice, of equality and moral solidarity,

affirmed in the *Torah* as well as in the Gospel, were in fact reflected in the high human ideals and in the protection of universal rights found in the United States. These in turn exercised a strong positive influence on the history of Europe and other parts of the world. But the paths of the immigrants in their new land were not always easy. Sadly enough, prejudice and discrimination were also known in the New World as well as in the Old. Nevertheless, together, Jews and Catholics have contributed to the success of the American experiment in religious freedom, and, in this unique concept, have given to the world *a vigorous form of interreligious dialogue* between our two ancient traditions. For those engaged in this dialogue, so important to the Church and to the Jewish people, I pray: May God bless you and make you strong for his service! 3. At the same time, our common heritage, task and hope do not eliminate *our distinctive identities*. Because of her specific Christian witness. "The Church must preach Jesus Christ to the world". In so doing we proclaim that "Christ is our peace" (*Guidelines*, 1974. I). As the Apostle Paul said: "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 *Cor.* 5, 18). At the same time, we recognize and appreciate the spiritual treasures of the Jewish people and their religious witness to God. A fraternal theological dialogue will try to understand, in the light of the mystery of redemption, how differences in faith should not cause enmity but open up the way of "*reconciliation*", so that in the end "God may be all in all" (1 *Cor.* 15, 28). In this regard I am pleased that the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Synagogue Council of America are initiating a consultation between Jewish leaders and bishops which should carry forward a dialogue on issues of the greatest interest to the two faith communities. 4. Considering history in the light of the principles of faith in God, we must also reflect on the catastrophic event of the *Shoah*, that ruthless and inhuman attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe, an attempt that resulted in millions of victims – including women and children, the elderly and the sick – *exterminated only because they were Jews*. Considering this mystery of the suffering of Israel's children, their witness of hope, of faith and of humanity under dehumanizing outrages, the Church experiences ever more deeply her *common bond with the Jewish people* and with their treasure of spiritual riches in the past and in the present. It is also fitting to recall the strong, unequivocal efforts of the Popes *against anti-Semitism and Nazism* at the height of the persecution against the Jews. Back in 1938, Pius XI declared that "anti-Semitism cannot be admitted", and he declared the total opposition between Christianity and Nazism by stating that the Nazi cross is an "enemy of the Cross of Christ" (*Eiusdem Allocutio in die Navitatis Domini*, 1938). And I am convinced that history will reveal ever more clearly and convincingly how deeply Pius XII felt the tragedy of the Jewish people, and how hard and effectively he worked to assist them during the Second World War. Speaking in the name of humanity and Christian principles, the Bishop's Conference of the United States denounced the atrocities with a clear statement: "Since the murderous assault on Poland, utterly devoid of every semblance of humanity, there has been a premeditated and systematic extermination of the people of this nation. The same satanic technique is being applied to many other peoples. We feel a deep sense of revulsion against the cruel indignities heaped upon the Jews in conquered countries and upon defenceless peoples not of our faith" (Conf. Episc. Foederatarum Civitatum amer. Sept. *Declaratio*, die 14 nov. 1942). We also remember many others, who, at risk of their own lives, helped persecuted Jews, and are honoured by the

Jews with the title of "*Tzaddigê 'ummôt ha-'olâm*" (Righteous of the Nations). 5. The terrible tragedy of your people has led many *Jewish thinkers* to reflect on the human condition with acute insights. Their vision of man and the roots of this vision in the teachings of the Bible, which we share in our common heritage of the Hebrew Scriptures, offer Jewish and Catholic scholars much useful material for reflection and dialogue. *And I am thinking here above all of the contribution of Martin Buber and also of Mahler and Levinas.* In order to understand even more deeply *the meaning of the Shoah and the historical roots of anti-Semitism* that are related to it, *joint collaboration and studies* by Catholics and Jews on the *Shoah* should be continued. Such studies have already taken place through many conferences in your country, such as the National Workshops on Christian-Jewish Relations. The religious and historical implications of the *Shoah* for Christians and Jews will now be taken up formally by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, meeting later this year in the United States for the first time. And as was affirmed in the important and very cordial meeting I had with Jewish leaders in Castelgandolfo on 1 September, a Catholic document on the *Shoah* and anti-Semitism will be forthcoming, resulting from such serious studies. Similarly, it is to be hoped that common educational programs on our historical and religious relations, which are well developed in your country, will truly promote mutual respect and teach future generations about *the Holocaust* so that never again will such a horror be possible. Never again! When meeting the leaders of the Polish Jewish community, in Warsaw, in June of this year, I underscored the fact that through the terrible experience of the *Shoah*, your people have become "a loud warning voice for all of humanity, for all nations, for all the powers of this world, for every system and every individual... a saving warning" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Allocutio ad hebraicam communitatem in Polonia commorantem*, die 14 iun. 1987: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, X, 2 (1987) 2221). 6. It is also desirable that *in every diocese Catholics should implement, under the direction of the bishops*, the statement of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent instructions issued by the Holy See regarding the correct way to preach and teach about Jews and Judaism. I know that a great many efforts in this direction have already been made by Catholics, and I wish to express *my gratitude* to all those who have worked so diligently for this aim. 7. Necessary for any sincere dialogue is the intention of each partner to allow others *to define themselves "in the light of their own religious experience"* (*Guidelines*, 1974, Introd.). In fidelity to this affirmation, Catholics recognize among the elements of the Jewish experience that Jews have a religious attachment to the Land, which finds its roots in biblical tradition. After the tragic extermination of the *Shoah*, the Jewish people began a new period in their history. They have a *right to a homeland* as does any civil nation, according to international law. "For the Jewish people who live in the State of Israel and who preserve in that land such precious testimonies to their history and their faith, we must ask for the desired security and the due tranquillity that is the prerogative of every nation and condition of life and of progress for every society" (Ioannis Pauli PP. II *Redemptionis Anno*, die 20 apr. 1984: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, VII, 1 (1984) 1072). What has been said about the right to a homeland also applies to the Palestinian people, so many of whom remain homeless and refugees. While all concerned must honestly reflect on the past—Muslims no less than Jews and Christians— it is time to forge those solutions which will lead to *a just, complete and lasting peace in that area*. For this

peace I earnestly pray. 8. Finally, as I thank you once again for the warmth of your greeting to me, *I give praise and thanks to the Lord for this fraternal meeting*, for the gift of dialogue between our peoples, and for the new and deeper understanding between us. As our long relationship moves towards its third millennium, it is our great privilege in this generation to be witnesses to this progress. It is my sincere hope that, as partners in dialogue, as fellow believers in the God who revealed himself, as children of Abraham, we will strive to render *a common service to humanity*, which is so much needed in this our day. We are called to collaborate in service and to unite in a common cause wherever a brother or sister is unattended, forgotten, neglected or suffering in any way; wherever human rights are endangered or human dignity offended; wherever the rights of God are violated or ignored. With the Psalmist, I now repeat: "I will hear what God proclaims; the Lord – for he proclaims peace to his people, and to his faithful ones, and to those who put in him their hope" (Ps. 85, 9). To all of you, dear friends, dear brothers and sisters; to all of you dear Jewish people of America: with great hope I wish you the peace of the Lord: *Shalom! Shalom!* God bless you on this Sabbath and in this year: *Shabbath Shalom! Shanah Tovah weHatimah Tovah!*

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