The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO A GROUP OF JEWISH LEADERS AND PERSONS RESPONSIBLE
FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CONCERT
IN COMMEMORATION OF THE SHOAH

Consistory Hall
Thursday, 7 April 1994

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is indeed a significant meeting, and I am especially pleased to welcome this distinguished group of Jewish leaders and persons responsible for the organization of *the Concert in commemoration of the Shoah*, to be held this evening in the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican. In particular, I welcome the survivors of the terrible experience of the concentration camps who honour us with their presence. A word of greeting also goes to Maestro Gilbert Levine, who has done so much to make this event possible.

Your visit inevitably brings to my mind the times I have gone on pilgrimage to Auschwitz and Dachau. During the first year of my Pontificate I again went to Auschwitz, and before the memorial stone with its Hebrew inscription I sought to express the profound emotion evoked in me by "the memory of the People whose sons and daughters were destined for total extermination". As I said on that occasion: "This People has its origin in Abraham, who is our father in faith (cf. Rom. 4:12), as Paul of Tarsus expressed it. It is precisely this People, which had received from God the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill', which has experienced in itself to a particular degree what killing means. No one may pass by this inscription with indifference" (John Paul II, *Homily at the Concentration Camp of Brzezinka*, 2 [7 June 1979]). I used these same words in 1986 when I visited the Rome Synagogue. In this city too the Jewish community paid a high price in blood for the simple reason of being Jewish. As on that occasion, so once again today I express "a word of abhorrence for the genocide decreed against the Jewish people during the Second World War, which led to the holocaust of millions of innocent people" (John Paul II, *Address to the Jewish Community of Rome*, 3 [13 April 1986]).

The Concert this evening is a commemoration of those horrifying events. The candles which will burn as we listen to the music will keep before us the long history of anti–semitism which culminated in the Shoah. But it is not enough that we

remember; for in our own day, regrettably, there are many new manifestations of the anti-semitism, xenophobia and racial hatred which were the seeds of those unspeakable crimes. *Humanity cannot permit all that to happen again*. Our shared hope is that the music which we shall listen to together will confirm our resolve to consolidate the good relations between our two communities, so that with the help of Almighty God we can work together to prevent the repetition of such heinous evil.

We must be deeply grateful to all who work to secure ever wider and fuller recognition of the "bond" and "common spiritual patrimony" which exist between Jews and Christians (*Nostra Aetate*, 4). In the past, these links have inspired deeds of courageous solidarity. In this regard, as a matter of historical fact, one cannot forget that in my own homeland, as in other countries and also here in Rome, in the terrible days of the Shoah, many Christians together with their Pastors, strove to help their brothers and sisters of the Jewish community, even at the cost of their own lives. In the face of the perils which threaten the sons and daughters of this generation, Christians and Jews together have a great deal to offer to a world struggling to distinguish good from evil, a world called by the Creator to defend and protect life, but so vulnerable to voices which propagate values that only bring death and destruction.

As we listen together this evening to the music that will be performed for us, may we all be moved to repeat in our hearts David's Song of Ascents: "How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity!" (Ps. 133 (132), 1).

This is the hope I express for Jews and Christians everywhere. This hope enlivens my prayer for peace in the Holy Land which is so close to all our hearts.