



PRIME MINISTER

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PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA - 24 NOVEMBER 1986

Your Holiness, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to our Parliament House.

Your Holiness, the Australian Government and people, and most especially those of Catholic faith, have long looked forward to your visiting our country as Pope John Paul II. We know of course that you visited Australia in 1973 as a Cardinal for the International Eucharistic Congress. But it is a particular honour for us now that you have come, in response to the invitations of the Government and the Australian Catholic Bishops, for a longer, more intensive visit.

As the head of the Roman Catholic Church, you will receive a particularly warm welcome from Australia's large Catholic community.

Catholics have had an enormous and enriching influence on the culture and politics of this country.

They made their presence felt here from the beginning of European settlement, particularly through the Irish community. The successful struggle of Irish Australians to have themselves and the Catholic faith recognised as equals in our society, and their determination not to stand apart from the rest of the community, were major factors in shaping our history.

In more recent times, Catholics from Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, the Spanish-speaking world, Vietnam and other countries have enhanced the richness and diversity of our country.

And on this occasion, Your Holiness, it would be highly remiss of me to fail to acknowledge our Polish community, which while maintaining close links with its native country, has made a distinctive and important contribution to Australian life.

The Roman Catholic Church in Australia has made and continues to play a vital role in the care of our sick and our aged and our orphans and in the education of generations of Australian youth.

One of the abiding issues in the development of Australian education has been the division of responsibility between Church and State. My Government is particularly proud of the level of understanding which has been reached between the Government and non-government education sectors on the key issue of funding. The result is a new confidence and cooperative spirit between the major providers of education in this country.

In the Parliament, Catholics have made their mark on both sides of politics at the highest level. It is without any sense of political partisanship that I point with pride to the strong and enduring historical links between the Australian Catholic community and the Australian Labor Party.

As for our nation's intellectual life, it has been greatly enriched by a glittering vein of Catholic artists, thinkers and educators - Max Charlesworth, Mary and Elizabeth Durack, Margaret Manion, Les Murray, Patrick Moran, Patrick O'Farrell, George Zubrzycki to name but a few.

Nor is it possible adequately to describe the role of the Catholic Church in this country without recalling some of the enduring names of the Church, men and women who have been great church leaders as well as great Australians.

I think in particular of Mother Mary McKillop, and Australia's three native-born Cardinals, Cardinals Gilroy, Knox and Freeman.

Your Holiness, I make these brief remarks about the Catholic contribution to our society in order to help explain one of the most important factors making for stability and social well-being in Australia - that is the way in which, perhaps more than any comparable country, we have overcome and left behind religious sectarianism. Whatever their faith and background, Australians have shown a remarkable capacity to create a harmonious, plural and multicultural society.

Your Holiness, we know that one of the principal concerns of your papacy has been the dignity of work and the entitlement of people to meaningful employment and to effective trade unionism. This Government wholeheartedly endorses these sentiments. The search for ways of expanding the participation in work, particularly for young Australians, is one of the great tasks of Government in this country and one to which we are devoting much of our time and resources.

If we turn to international affairs, we see again that the Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of Your Holiness has made a distinctive contribution to world affairs. The Government and people of Australia share your commitment to the cause of peace, religious freedom, development and human rights.

I believe that Your Holiness' visits to our country, and to so many other countries throughout the world since you assumed the papacy 8 years ago, have helped to stimulate efforts towards ensuring a safer and more harmonious world.

Australia has welcomed your initiatives towards peace and your call for mutual and effective disarmament. Your efforts in this regard have been specially highlighted in this the International Year of Peace. For its part, the Government is doing all in its power to encourage progress towards balanced and verifiable nuclear disarmament and has given the International Year of Peace special prominence in this country.

Let me also say, Your Holiness, how pleased we are that you are about to participate in a candle-lighting ceremony here which will symbolise your personal commitment to peace in the world.

We have, as a Government, maintained close contact with the Holy See on developments of importance to us in our region and appreciate the constructive role the Catholic Church has played, especially in the human rights area, in the Philippines and elsewhere.

And we have noted the important part the Catholic Bishops, along with the Council of Churches, continue to play in attempting to persuade the South African Government to dismantle its abhorrent system of apartheid and in seeking dialogue among the different racial groups.

Your personal efforts towards international understanding and co-operation, and your advocacy of the dignity of the human person and of freedom of worship, have won the admiration of Australians and have inspired people the world over not to abandon their faith in those ideals.

Your Holiness, in the next 6 days you will visit each of the States and the Northern Territory. We are indeed pleased that you will see so much of our country and that you will have the opportunity to make contact with large numbers of Australians, in many different walks of life.

And since you have also been a forceful advocate for the rights of indigenous peoples in the countries you have visited, we are pleased that you are taking the opportunity to visit some of Australia's Aboriginal people. We know that your meeting with them will be a memorable and uplifting event - as indeed it will be throughout the entire Australian community, and for all Australians.

I invite the Leader of the Opposition, Mr John Howard, to support my remarks.
