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**Bishops' Committee
for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**

The Faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever

Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations

Foreword

The Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference in May 1992 stand in logical succession to the fourth paragraph of the Decree *Nostra Aetate* of the Second Vatican Council.

Impelled by the inspiration of Pope John XXIII, the Council wished to inaugurate a fresh start in Catholic-Jewish relations. The main affirmations of paragraph four were these three. Firstly, the Catholic Church acknowledged the unique link that binds it to the Jewish people. Secondly the Church recognised that the gifts of God are irrevocable, and that therefore the covenant made by God with the descendants of Abraham still stands. Thirdly, the Church condemned and deplored displays of anti-Semitism at any time and from any source.

These three principles were built upon and more specifically applied in subsequent documents of the Vatican: *Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration Nostra Aetate* (1974) and *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985).

A special event for Catholics and Jews in Australia was the meeting with Pope John Paul II at St Mary's Cathedral Presbytery, Sydney, on 26th November 1986. The text of the Pope's address on that occasion is reproduced here.

Great differences of doctrine continue to separate Catholics from Jews. It is possible nonetheless that with faith in the common Lord and Father of us all, and with mutual respect and esteem for one another, we may work together to promote love and peace in our society. The vision of that possibility, together with a sense of justice and fellowship in a shared tradition, prompted the Council to make a fresh start in relations between Catholics and Jews. We bishops of Australia have wanted to take up that invitation in our country. The Guidelines included here are intended to help the Catholic community in so doing.

BEDE V. HEATHER
CHAIRMAN
Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
2nd November 1992

Introduction

This is the first time that the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference has issued a set of guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations. The need has become evident for a number of reasons:

1. Increase of Racism in Recent Times

The Jewish community in Australia – now estimated to be about 100,000* has not escaped recent racist attacks on various ethnic groups. While expressions of prejudice among the general public have not been as extreme as in European countries, there have been arson attacks and vandalism on synagogues and other institutions, not only in Sydney and Melbourne, where most Jews live, but in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth. In addition, there have been verbal attacks on leaders in the Jewish community. Over the last two years there has been a major increase in anti-semitic attacks.

2. Growing Interest in Interfaith Relations

The ever increasing multi-cultural and consequent multi-faith nature of our society, especially with the influx of refugees, emphasises the need for conversations with traditions other than Christian. Conversation with Judaism, our parent faith, is the obvious starting point.

3. Large Numbers of Jewish Holocaust Survivors

Percentage-wise, Australian Jewry has the highest number of survivors in the world. They still find themselves exposed to denials of the Holocaust, attempted relativising of the event and impatience with Jewish sensitivity.

4. The Decade of Evangelism and the Emphasis on Evangelisation

Some forms of evangelisation are causing concern among Jews who fear it is a return to proselytising which disregards the religious freedom of the individual.

5. The Upsurge of Fundamentalism especially in Scripture Interpretation

Such an interpretation fails to appreciate the cultural and historical element in the formation of the Bible and its Jewish roots which give a much fuller and richer appreciation of the biblical message.

6. More Catholic Participation in Jewish-Christian Groups

Thanks to the lead given to Catholics at the Second Vatican Council, especially with the declaration on the Church's Relationship with Non-Christian Religions and subsequent documents, the example of the Popes and others in key positions, more and more Catholics are becoming involved in Jewish-Catholic and Jewish-Christian groups. These include the Councils of Christians and Jews in Victoria and New South Wales and the Australian Council of Christians and Jews recently formed. Very recently one of the Councils was approached for the purpose of exploring areas of collaboration on social issues by the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council.

7. The Close Bonds that Unite Us

The Church's relationship to Judaism is unique since it is the root from which we receive our faith. We read in *Nostra Aetate*: "For the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to the mystery of God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets ... since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this Synod wishes to foster and recommend the mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues" (NA n.4.).

Guidelines

When the Second Vatican Council passed its Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* on 28 October, 1965, towards the end of its final session, it included in that document a comparatively brief but very important statement on the Jewish people.

This statement reminded the Church of its roots in Judaism and called for the complete rejection of certain erroneous ideas about the Jews which, for centuries, had been only too common amongst Catholics and other Christians. Specifically, "Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scriptures"; nor can the Passion of Jesus "be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today" (NA n.4).

These false ideas had, in fact, been the excuse for "the hatred, persecutions and displays of anti-

semitism directed against the Jews" by Christians from very early in the Christian centuries. This behaviour must be eliminated from Catholic lives, where unfortunately, it is often still present, and we are, instead, to cultivate "that mutual understanding and respect that is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues" with the Jews. (NA n.4).

The mere making of this statement did not automatically bring about the desired change. The next step had to be the setting up of a process of investigation and education throughout the Church. While religious textbooks used in primary and secondary schools and in seminaries had been studied in several countries in the years just before the beginning of the Council – some books having been amended or replaced when anti-semitic material had been found in them – this study would need to be done everywhere. Similarly, although work had also been done on liturgical texts in the years before the Council, particularly on those used in the Holy Week Liturgy, and some changes had been made, there was still need for more study at greater depth – and attention would also have to be given to the content of sermons and homilies.

The Holy See has been of considerable help in this work. In 1974, *Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews* were published and distributed to all Catholic dioceses, detailing catechetical, liturgical and social action procedures that would give effect to the Council's call for change and for positive action on Catholic-Jewish Relations. Ten years later, on 24 June, 1985, *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* was addressed specifically to 'preachers and teachers', to those whose function it is to teach religion in churches, colleges and schools.

The present Pope, in numerous addresses and in many countries, has also sought to give positive direction to Catholic-Jewish relations and 'brotherly and sisterly dialogue'. Thus, speaking to delegates of Episcopal Conferences in Rome on Relations with Judaism, he made a remarkable statement about the need for collaboration with the Jews in the working out of the Church's own mission in the world: "Our common heritage impels us towards this, our common heritage of service to humanity and its immense spiritual and material needs. Through different but finally convergent ways we will be able to reach, with the help of the Lord who has never ceased loving his people (cf. Romans 11:1), this true brother/sisterhood in reconciliation and respect, and to contribute to a full implementation of God's plan in history". (6th March 1982). Speaking with representatives of the Jewish community during his visit here in 1986, he stated that Catholics must think of the Jewish people as their elder brothers and sisters and must hold anti-semitism to be sinful. He also referred to the Shoah/Holocaust because Australia has such a high percentage of Jewish survivors. ([see the address](#))

Notes reminded us of the permanence of Israel as an historical fact and of the 'religious attachment' of Jews to the land of their ancestors and of the establishment of the State of Israel according to international law. (Information Service, Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 57 (1985.1)).

It is to support and advance the work of education and reconciliation incumbent on all Christians, clerical, religious and lay, living amongst Jewish people or not, that we publish these Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations in Australia.

General Principles

1. It is recommended that in each diocese a commission or secretariat, or member of an ecumenical commission, be assigned to the promotion of fruitful Catholic-Jewish relations. Mutual understanding should be fostered among the faithful, even in dioceses where there is no large Jewish community.
2. Catholics – clergy, religious and laity – should look for ways in which they can foster Catholic-Jewish relations e.g. by forming or joining organisations which have the purpose of bringing Christians and Jews together, such as the Council of Christians and Jews; or by forming

- groups amongst themselves for study and discussion with Jews. In many of these interfaith activities, an ecumenical approach can be enriching for all involved. Extended public and formal projects, however, would normally require the approval of the bishop in the diocese.
3. The aims of all Catholic-Jewish meetings should be to increase our understanding both of Judaism and Catholicism, to eliminate sources of tension, to initiate dialogues or conversations on different levels, to multiply intergroup meetings between Catholics and Jews, and to promote co-operative action for social justice, respect for the rights of persons and nations and for social and international reconciliation. "To this we are driven, Jews and Christians, by the command to love our neighbour, by a common hope for the Kingdom of God and by the great heritage of the Prophets". (Notes n.11.11)
 4. These meetings should be marked by a genuine respect for the religious conscience and convictions of all participants, and by a willingness to listen to and learn from the other. They should be jointly planned and developed.
 5. It is recommended that, when joining in conversation at an academic level, its organisation be accomplished in consultation with those experienced in the structural, doctrinal and interpersonal skills that such gatherings require. The same approach should be taken in the making of decisions and plans for social action.
 6. Proselytism, which does not respect human freedom, is to be avoided. While the Christian, through the faith life of word and deed, will always witness to Jesus as the Risen Christ, the conversations have to be concerned with the permanent vocation of the Jews as God's people, the enduring values that Judaism shares with Christianity and with the vocation of the Church and the Jewish people to witness to the whole world.
 7. On occasions of common concern, such as peace and the welfare of the community, Jews and Christians may, after mutual agreement, come together to pray. This prayer would find its common faith in the one God.
 8. Recognising the difficulties in inter-religious marriages, each party should seek to know well both religious traditions so as to enable them to be co-operative with the religious duties of the other. Continuing pastoral care is also suggested.
 9. A central principle underlies all the above, namely that "Christians must strive to learn by what essential traits Jews define themselves in the light of their own religious experience". (*Guidelines: Introduction*). Topics such as the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews and the rebirth of the State of Israel will obviously come up for discussion under this principle. With regard to the latter, Catholics should make an honest effort "to understand the link between the land and the people which Jews have expressed in their writings and worship throughout two millennia." (National Conference of Catholic Bishops U.S.A., 1977).

Recommended Activities

1. Conversations

Catholic-Jewish relations should be advanced on all levels – academic and popular, religious and social. As already mentioned, a favoured instrument is the inter-change, a form of group conversation in which competent participants discuss assigned topics or themes in openness, candour and friendship. Those not well versed in inter-religious affairs run the risk of unwittingly offending by inaccurate portrayal of the other's doctrines or way of life.

2. Church Documents

Diocesan and parochial organisations, schools, colleges, universities and especially seminaries should organise programs to explain and implement the Conciliar statement and subsequent official documents.

3. Preaching and Teaching

These teachings should be explained from the pulpit and the Catholic people should be exhorted to participate in programs suited to the parochial level. Special care should be taken never to use the pulpit to portray Judaism as rejected by God or in any way unworthy of our love and esteem. In fact, as a religion, Judaism is as valid, rich and vital as it ever was, and our theology, liturgy, spirituality and pastoral practice should be further enriched by

elements from their Judaic counterparts. Further, the election and mission of the Jewish people have permanent importance in the religious history of humanity. Jewish history did not end with Jesus, nor with the destruction of Jerusalem. As Paul, a Jew, said: "as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:28f).

4. Printed Texts and the Media

School texts, prayer books and other media should, under competent auspices, continue to be examined in order to remove not only those materials that do not accord with the content and spirit of the Church's teaching, but also those that fail to show Judaism's continuing role in salvation history in a positive light.

5. Mutual Understanding

It is recommended that Catholic-Jewish understanding be fostered by means of combined or separate visits to places of worship, schools, museums and any other places or sites that may be of interest. Joint social events and home dialogues are also useful, but when food is provided by Catholics on such occasions, they should always be mindful of the religious dietary laws observed by Jewish participants. In relation to Passover, it should be emphasised that the prime reason why Christians may celebrate the Passover festival should be to acknowledge common roots in the history of salvation. Any sense of 'restaging' the Last Supper should be avoided (see Appendix). Religious services commemorating the victims of the Holocaust can, if properly prepared and celebrated, provide occasions for increasing the sensitivity of Christians concerning Jews and Judaism.

6. Social Action

Catholic-Jewish co-operation should be encouraged in those social action endeavours designed to promote public welfare and morality especially peace and justice.

7. Resources

Orientation and resource material for the foregoing recommendations may be sought from the Jewish and Christian organisations that have been active in the field of Christian-Jewish Relations.

8. Centres and Programs for In-Depth Studies

While parish and local programs should be pressed forward without delay, more extended and deeper explorations by Catholic and Jewish scholars into pertinent issues should also be given a high priority. Research in history, psychology and biblical studies by individual Catholic and Jewish scholars as well as collaborative scholarly enterprises are to be highly commended. Catholic seminaries and institutions of higher learning are especially important centres for such ongoing scholarly activity. The establishment of courses of Jewish studies, if possible conducted by Jewish scholars, is also encouraged.

9. Specific Day to Mark the *Nostra Aetate* Declaration

Provision should be made in the Australian Catholic Church calendar for an annual day to be set aside for prayer, study or conversations on the special relationship between the two traditions.

10. Themes for Interchange and Dialogue

The following themes which, among others, are viewed by Christians and Jews involved in the interchange as important issues affecting Christian-Jewish relations, merit the attention and study of Catholic educators and scholars.

- a. Scholarly studies and educational efforts should be undertaken to show the common historical, biblical, doctrinal and liturgical heritage shared by Catholics and Jews, as well as their differences. This involves not only an appreciation of the Hebrew Scriptures as authentic divine revelation and a source of faith with perpetual value for both Jews and Christians, but also, as indicated above, a recognition of Judaism as a living tradition that has a strong and creative religious life through the centuries that have followed the birth of Christianity from the common root.
- b. In keeping with the Church's strong repudiation of anti-semitism, a frank and honest treatment is needed in our history books, courses and seminary curricula. Anti-semitism has resulted in centuries of persecution which reached a climax in this

- century with the Nazi attempt to destroy the Jewish population of Europe.
- c. Continuing studies are needed of the life of Jesus and of the primitive Church in the setting of the richly diverse and creative religious, social and cultural life of the Jewish community in the first century of the Common Era.
 - d. An explicit rejection should be made of the historically inaccurate notion that the Judaism of that time, especially Pharisaism, was hypocritical and nothing more than empty external observance. Scholars are increasingly aware that Jesus "shares, with the majority of Palestinian Jews of that time, some Pharisaic doctrines: the resurrection of the body; forms of piety, like alms-giving, prayer, fasting (cf. Mt. 6:1-18) and the liturgical practice of addressing God as Father; the priority of the commandment to love God and our neighbour" (*Notes III.6*). Indeed, many Jewish teachers adopted positions similar to those of Jesus on the critical religious and social issues of the time.
 - e. Catholic scholars need to assess the living and complex reality of Judaism after Christ – for example, in rabbinic literature – and the irrevocable election of the Jewish people, stressed by St Paul, and to incorporate the theological and spiritual results into Catholic teaching.
 - f. Further analysis of the use and implications for today of such expressions as "the Jews" by St. John, and of other New Testament references that appear to place all Jews in a negative light, is also called for.

CONCLUSION

We strongly urge the implementation of these Guidelines. We hope that this concretising of the teaching of the Church in Australia will give a new impetus to Catholic-Jewish understanding and advance us on the way to that day when the whole Church, and the world in general, will know the Lord and "justice and peace will embrace". (Psalm 85).

BEDE V. HEATHER

CHAIRMAN, Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, 1st May 1992

*This will not tally with the Census figures because it is a well-known fact that a considerable number of Jews choose not to answer that particular question.

Appendix

Passover

In recent years numbers of Catholics have become interested in celebrating Passover (Pesach, Seder). Thus it is necessary to draw attention to the following:

- i. Passover is a feast sacred to the Jews. When non-Jews demonstrate it, the rites of the Haggadah should be respected in all their integrity. For this reason the use of a text approved by a Rabbi is recommended; even if a text has been approved overseas, the local Rabbi should be consulted, as attitudes vary somewhat with place and circumstances.
- ii. It is desirable to invite a Jewish couple or family to conduct the rite.
- iii. One of the chief reasons for this celebration by Christians should be to acknowledge and experience some of what we have received from the Jews in the history of salvation.
- iv. This ritual has value as background for teaching about the Last Supper, but it should never be a hybrid presentation of Jewish and Christian celebrations.
- v. In recent years some Catholics have chosen to attend a Seder on Holy Thursday instead of the Catholic Liturgy. Thus they celebrate the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt, while omitting the celebration of our Passover and deliverance in Christ. It is strongly

recommended that the Seder experience be held outside Holy Week, or at least at a time allowing for attendance at the Holy Week ceremonies.

Extract from the Decree *Nostra Aetate*

**of the Second Vatican Council
on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions
Rome 28th October 1965**

4. As this sacred Synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it recalls the spiritual bond linking the people of the New Covenant with Abraham's stock.

For the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to the mystery of God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are already found among the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ, Abraham's sons according to faith (cf. Gal. 3:7), are included in the same patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church was mystically foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage.

The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy deigned to establish the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that good olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 11:17-24). Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, our Peace, reconciled Jew and Gentile, making them both one in Himself (cf. Eph. 2:14-16).

Also, the Church ever keeps in mind the words of the apostle about his kinsmen, "who have the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenant and the legislation and the worship and the promises; who have the fathers, and from whom is Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the son of the Virgin Mary. The Church recalls too that from the Jewish people sprang the apostles, her foundation stones and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ to the world.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation (cf. Lk. 19:44), nor did the Jews in large number accept the gospel; indeed, not a few opposed the spreading of it (cf. Rom. 11:28). Nevertheless, according to the Apostle, the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, for He does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues (cf. Rom. 11:28-29). In company with the prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him with one accord" (Soph. 3:9; cf. Is. 66:23; Ps. 65:4; Rom. 11:11-32).

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred Synod wishes to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit above all of biblical and theological studies, and of brotherly dialogues.

True, authorities of the Jews and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (cf. Jn.19:6); still, what happened in His passion cannot be blamed upon all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should take pains, then, lest in catechetical instruction and in the preaching of God's Word they teach anything out of harmony with the truth of the gospel and the spirit of Christ.

The Church repudiates all persecutions against any man. Moreover, mindful of her common patrimony with the Jews, and motivated by the gospel's spiritual love and by no political considerations, she deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source.

Besides, as the Church has always held and continues to hold, Christ in His boundless love freely underwent His passion and death because of the sins of all men, so that all might attain salvation. It is therefore, the duty of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

Address of Pope [John Paul II](#)

to Jewish Community Leaders, Sydney, 26th November, 1986

Mr President,

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, I had the pleasure and privilege of visiting the Synagogue in Rome and of speaking with the Rabbis and the assembled congregation. At that time I gave "thanks" and praise to the Lord who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth (Is 51:16) and who chose Abraham in order to make him the father of a multitude of children, as numerous 'as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the sea shore' " (Gen. 22:17; cf. Is 15:5). I gave thanks and praise to him because it had been his good pleasure, in the mystery of his providence, that the meeting was taking place. Today, I praise and thank him again because he has brought me, in this great Southern land, into the company of another group of Abraham's descendants, a group which is representative of many Jewish people in Australia. May he bless you and make you strong for his service!

It is my understanding that, although the experience of Jews in Australia – an experience going right back to the beginning of white settlement in 1788 – has not been without its measure of sorrow, prejudice and discrimination, it has included more civil and religious freedom than was to be found in many of the countries of the old World. At the same time, this is still the century of the Shoah, the inhuman and ruthless attempt to exterminate European Jewry; and I know that Australia has given asylum and a new home to thousands of refugees and survivors from that ghastly series of events. To them in particular I say, as I said to your brothers and sisters, the Jews of Rome, "the Church, in the words of the well-known Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 'deplores the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and by anyone'".

My hope for this meeting is that it will help to consolidate and extend the improved relations you already have with members of the Catholic community in this country. I know that there are men and women throughout Australia, Jews and Catholics alike, who are working, as I stated at the Synagogue in Rome, "to overcome old prejudices and to secure ever wider and fuller recognition of that 'bond' and that 'common spiritual patrimony' that exists between Jews and Christians". I give thanks to God for this.

Where Catholics are concerned, it will continue to be an explicit and very important part of my mission to repeat and emphasize that our attitude to the Jewish religion should be one of the greatest respect, since the Catholic faith is rooted in the eternal truths contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, and in the irrevocable covenant made with Abraham. We too gratefully hold these same truths of our Jewish heritage, and look upon you as our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

For the Jewish people themselves, Catholics should have not only respect but also great fraternal love; for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God who has called them with an irrevocable calling. No valid theological justification could ever be found for acts of discrimination or persecution against Jews. In fact, such acts must be held to be sinful.

In order to be frank and sincere we must recognize the fact that there are still obvious differences between us, in religious belief and practice. The most fundamental difference is in our respective views on the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing however prevents us from true and fraternal co-operation in many worthy enterprises, such as biblical studies and numerous works of

justice and charity. Such combined undertakings can bring us ever closer together in friendship and trust.

Through the Law and the Prophets, we, like you, have been taught to put a high value on human life and on fundamental and inalienable human rights. Today, human life, which should be held sacred from the moment of conception, is being threatened in many different ways. Violations of human rights are widespread.

This makes it all the more important for all people of good will to stand together to defend life, to defend the freedom of religious belief and practice, and to defend all other fundamental human freedoms.

Finally, I am sure we agree that, in a secularized society, there are many widely held values which we cannot accept. In particular, consumerism and materialism are often presented, especially to the young, as the answers to human problems. I express my admiration for the many sacrifices you have made to operate religious schools for your children, in order to help them evaluate the world around them from the perspective of faith in God. As you know, Australian Catholics have done the same. In secularized society, such institutions are always likely to be attacked for one reason or another. Since Catholics and Jews value them for the same reasons, let us work together whenever possible in order to protect and promote the religious instruction of our children. In this way we can bear common witness to the Lord of all.

Mr President and Members of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, I thank you once again for this meeting, and I give praise and thanks to the Lord in the words of the Psalmist:

"Praise the Lord, all nations!
Extol him, all peoples!
For great is his steadfast love toward us;
and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever.
Praise the Lord!"

Psalm 116/117