



# News Release in answer to Pope John Paul II Universal Prayer and other Roman Catholic Statements. March 13, 2000

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The Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding (CCJU) of Sacred Heart University deeply appreciates the efforts of Pope John Paul II to promote interreligious dialogue and especially supports his most recent unprecedented gesture of reconciliation and friendship, offered yesterday, March 12, 2000. For the first time, the Pontiff asked forgiveness for the past and present faults of the sons and daughters of the Church. This gesture is one of the most significant signs of the Jubilee Year 2000. The CCJU believes that he is genuinely seeking to make amends and repent for a heartbreaking past. - It is difficult and painful for religions to admit failures and to correct inherited traditions. But we believe that prophetic self-criticism is the mark of a great person and a great religion. We should not use this apology as an opportunity to criticize or demean Christianity; rather, we should admire the courage and the prophetic grace it takes to speak in such a way. Given the size and inherent authority and tradition of the Catholic Church, there are some people who fear that these admissions will undermine the magisterium in the eyes of the faithful. Whatever the Pope does, there will be those who will say he is going too far. — In particular, the Pope is also dealing with a Jewish community still raw from the wounds of the Holocaust. In the eyes of some Jewish individuals, whatever he does will not be going far enough. He has a thankless task, but he is doing vital work and deserves our thanks and admiration. John Paul II needs to know that he is not laboring in vain, and the CCJU wants to encourage him to remain on the road of peace that he has chosen. — The Catholic Church has chosen to undertake the difficult journey of examination of conscience, self-renewal and repentance for the past and present faults of the Church's children. Pope John Paul II has asked for forgiveness in the name of the Catholic Church's one billion members, and it is important for the Jewish people to accept such gestures. Jews and Christians must continue together to challenge morally when there is indecision, to assist theologically when there are questions of doctrine, to respond supportively when there are gestures of friendship, and to dialogue respectfully when there are conflicts and choices to be made. We would hope that this magnificent statement of apology would encourage all peoples who at any time have injured others to take up the task of reconciliation and peace-making. — We are living in the midst of an extremely unusual and remarkable revolution. A century from now, people will look back and say that this time was marked by some of the greatest religious and moral achievements in the history of religion. Pope John Paul II has taught that Christianity must relate to Judaism as a valid religion and as its 'elder brother.' As such, Catholics affirm that Judaism is to be understood on its own terms, spoken for by self-affirming, independent spokesmen, and treated as an equal in every way. There is no returning to the former days of bitterness, denial and hatred. No group is perfect or blameless. In extending this mea culpa, the Pope is pledging his best efforts that the future

relationship between Christianity and Judaism will be one of respect and of mutual responsibility for building a better world. We will work together until both religions teach only love and forgiveness for each other and commitment to the dignity of every human being of every faith, all created in the image of God.

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