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Box 37, Folder 4, Koenig, Franz [Cardinal], 1988.



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April 7, 1988

His Eminence
Franz Cardinal Koenig
Archbishop Emeritus of Vienna
Wollseile 2
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My dear Cardinal Koenig,

It gave me the deepest personal pleasure to meet with you again after so many years during our recent meeting in Vienna convened by Dr. Mihalsky. It was a blessing to find you in such vital and energetic good health, and I pray that will continue for many years to come.

During our dinner conversation, you were kind enough to invite some reflections on how one might deal constructively with the forthcoming June visit of Pope John Paul II to Austria in relation to meetings with President Kurt Waldheim. (I would have written to you earlier, but unfortunately, I was hospitalized with a blood pressure problem which, thank God, has been resolved.)

May I submit the following for your consideration:

1) I am well aware of the long historic tradition that the Pope agrees to meet with any responsible persons who request an audience, particularly if he or she is a Catholic personality. But it is equally true that the international moral stature of the Holy Father rests on both his words and deeds in upholding the fundamental distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong.

The international outrage that accompanied the Pope's granting an audience to Dr. Waldheim on June 15, 1987, and then celebrating his career as a contribution to world peace and justice, demonstrates, I believe, the great damage that will be inflicted on the moral standing of the Holy Father and the Holy See. In my judgment, it would be disastrous if that were allowed to happen again during the 1988 visit to Austria.

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2) While I personally opposed the early unsubstantiated charges that Waldheim was a Nazi war criminal, recent evidence makes it abundantly clear that he was certainly an accessory to the horrendous crimes of massacre and torture in Yugoslavia, as well as deportations of some 40,000 Greek Jews to Auschwitz. While Waldheim persisted in lying and denying those facts, more recently he has been compelled to acknowledge the veracity of that evidence of his complicity.

That reality, I believe, provides an altogether different moral framework for any possible meeting between Pope John Paul II and Dr. Waldheim.

In that light, I would suggest that the following would be worthy of consideration:

1) It would be important for the Holy See to make it unmistakably clear in public ways that the Pope has come to Austria primarily in response to an invitation from the Austrian Catholic Bishops' Conference. This is first and foremost a pastoral visit of the Supreme Pontiff to the Catholic faithful in Austria.

2) This is the year of the Anschluss and Kristallnacht in Austria. This visit would be the time and the place for the Pope to call on the Austrian people to face forthrightly the moral and human tragedies of the Nazi holocaust, and to persist in learning lessons for today's Second Republic -- support of democratic constitutionalism and human rights, and vigorous and systematic opposition to the pathology of anti-Semitism, which, unfortunately continues to fester in parts of the Austrian population.

Your own declarations on these issues and those of the Austrian Catholic hierarchy, which we greatly welcome, provide models for reassertion through the full authority of the Holy Father.

3) The manner in which Chancellor Vranitsky and others have become central spokesmen on the anniversary of the Anschluss, and have relegated Dr. Waldheim to a marginal role because of his moral culpabilities would suggest, I believe, an appropriate model for the Pope's de-emphasizing his contact with Dr. Waldheim.

Knowing something about Vatican foreign policy, I recognize the inevitability of the Pope's necessary protocol meetings with heads of State. But one makes an important statement of universal import by the way the Pontiff treats these protocol visits. The world will be watching whether the Holy Father will "celebrate" that protocol encounter with Waldheim or will reduce it to relative insignificance.

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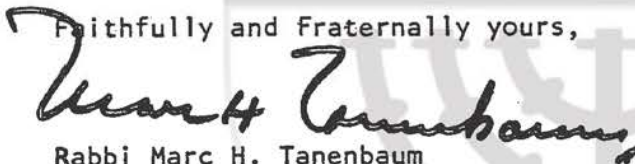
I make that point boldly because my concern has consistently been that two-thirds of Austria's population was born either during or after World War II, and young Austrians deserve and require a moral instruction from the Holy Father to stand vigorously against prejudice, anti-Semitism, and religious and racial hatreds. That, after all, was a major moral and spiritual accomplishment of Vatican Council II to which you made such magnificent intellectual contributions.

I presume to make these direct suggestions which you kindly requested because you have always been for me a model of profound moral integrity and truthfulness.

As your schedule allows, I would be glad to receive your response to these suggestions.

With my warm good wishes, and my prayers for God's richest blessing for your continued good health and strength, I am,

Faithfully and Fraternaly yours,



Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
Director
International Relations

