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**Criswell Visits Pope, Urges
Love Toward Catholics, Jews**

DALLAS (BP)--In a sermon relating his recent visit with Pope Paul VI and two high-ranking Jewish rabbis in Jerusalem, former Southern Baptist Convention President W. A. Criswell told worshippers here they should extend their open arms of love and fellowship to Catholics and Jews alike.

Declaring that Baptists should have "no rancor, no bitterness, no condemnation, no vengeance" in their relationships with Catholics and Jews, Criswell told the Sunday morning crowd that this "is not the way of Christ, the way of our Lord, the way of God.

"Can we not in true faith hold our arms like the arms of the cross out and embrace all mankind, not in hatred or in bitterness, but in love and prayer and invitation asking them to share with us the life we have found in Christ Jesus?" Criswell asked.

Criswell related his own personal experience and that shared by 413 participants in a tour he led to the Holy Land and the seven churches of Asia Minor during the Sunday morning sermon entitled, "The Pope, the Rabbi and the Pastor."

In an unprecedented development, the group was invited by Pope Paul VI to the Vatican for a personal audience with the Roman Catholic ruler. They were escorted into the papal chambers where, according to Criswell, "he receives only kings and queens and presidents and heads of state."

As the large Baptist group waited in the Sala Clementina (Pope Clement VIII Hall), the pope entered and bowed. Dressed in white robes, his arms were outstretched in welcome. An interpreter and two cardinals accompanied him, Criswell said.

Pope Paul, in a prepared address, called the visit of the Baptist group to the Vatican "a striking and perhaps unique illustration of a new spirit of friendship among those who call upon the name of Christ.

"We are pleased to encounter, under such a distinguished leader as Dr. W. A. Criswell, members of a Christian communion which since the foundation of your great nation has played so full a part in the development of the evangelizing and Christian education..." of America, he continued.

The pope concluded by expressing hope that the visit would be "an effective sign of a new effort at mutual understanding and cooperation."

After his brief address in English, Pope Paul presented to Criswell a "beautifully bound leather copy of Simon Peter's letters to the churches," and warmly greeted the Baptist pastor with both hands.

Later, in Jerusalem, Criswell and members of the tour group attended a state dinner for the general director of the ministry of religious affairs and spent an evening with Rabbi Shmuel Nathan, chairman of the advisory committee for the department of tourism. Rabbi Nathan presented to Criswell Israel's State Medal.

In his sermon, Criswell asked his congregation: "When Pope Paul offered his hand to me, did I compromise the faith when I offered my hand back again in love and friendship? When Rabbi Nathan offered his hand to me, did I repudiate my Baptist faith and heritage in offering my hand in love and friendship in return?"

He answered his question with more questions: "What is it to be a Baptist? Is it that I find myself in some corner and there I bite and snarl and cut and with all the language at

my command with vitriolic and acrimonious speech, I denounce and condemn? Or is it somebody who has found the Lord as his Savior and in love and in prayer and in sympathy and intercession seeks to hold up the cross of Christ and to invite all men everywhere to find in him life eternal?"

Criswell quoted former Baylor University President W. R. White as saying that fundamental, Bible-believing Baptists have the best doctrine and the worst spirit of any group in the earth, "They have the truth of God but present it in anger and criticism, caustic, vindictive, vitriolic, condemnatory, full of judgment and condemnation."

This is not the way of God, however, Criswell said. "Have we not had enough on the pages of bitter and bloody history of hatred and bitterness and conflict?"

Although he did not refer to it in his sermon, Criswell also visited in the Vatican with Jan Cardinal Willebrands, president of the Roman Catholic Secretariat for Christian Unity.

Catholic officials said that the visit with the pope was set up in record time after a telephone call three days before the meeting from a Catholic priest in Dallas. Most audiences with the pope are arranged weeks, even months, in advance, they said.

Criswell told his congregation that there are "hundreds of thousands who go to Rome every year who would give their right arms for an audience with the pope," and yet he and his tour group were granted an audience without even seeking it.

It was reportedly the first time such a large group of Southern Baptists had ever met with the pope in his chambers, although the pope has received individuals including Baptist evangelist Billy Graham, former SBC President Brooks Hays, and others.

In his visit with Cardinal Willebrands, Criswell reportedly asked him what could be done to develop better understanding and closer cooperation between Catholics and Baptists.

The cardinal replied that such efforts must come at the "grass roots" level, rather than being dictated from the top echelon of church structure.

Immediately upon his return to Dallas, Criswell met for the first time in his 27 years as a Dallas pastor with the bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Dallas.

Criswell met with Bishop Thomas Tschoepe and with Michael Sheehan, a Dallas priest recently named assistant general secretary of the US Catholic Conference who was in Rome at the time of Criswell's visit and was instrumental in arranging the audience with the pope.

Criswell's plane did not arrive until 3:00 a.m. from Zurich, so the Bishop suggested that they meet at Criswell's home rather than at the Catholic chancery.

They talked of Criswell's visit with the pope and the Baptist pastor asked both Catholic officials to write a personal message in the leather-bound volume the pope had presented him.

But the writing didn't stop there.

The religion editor for the Dallas Times Herald, Martha Man, who accompanied Criswell on the trip to Rome and covered his visit with the pope, asked the bishop, the priest and Criswell for their autographs.

She had broken her foot getting off one of the Criswell tour buses in Turkey and wanted them to autograph her cast. She asked them to sign it alongside the autograph of Bob Hope, whom she had interviewed at the Dallas airport only a few days earlier.