



Message from
The Rt Hon The Lord Sacks of Aldgate kt,
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

The visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI is an event of immense symbolic significance, reminding us as it does of the religious roots of European civilisation, the civilisation that eventually gave the world three revolutionary phenomena: the rise of science, the birth of liberty of conscience, and the free economy. None of these was achieved without profound tensions, between Christianity and the world, and within Christianity itself. But whether they are ultimately sustainable without religious foundations is wholly open to question. No purely secular regime has ever lasted for long.

The visit of the Pope occurs at a fateful time for Britain and Europe. What is the future of religion in our society? How can religious moderation be sustained against a growing religious/secular divide and ever more vociferous extremes? How can the relationship between faiths be improved? To this last, there is at least a positive answer. Vatican II (1965) transformed relationships between the Catholic Church on the one hand, and Judaism and Islam on the other. It is in this spirit that I welcome His Holiness the Pope as the guardian of that new relationship, which remains one of the greatest signals of hope in our time. ■