



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
DURANTE LA VISITA DEL CAPO DELLO STATO ITALIANO,
SENATORE FRANCESCO COSSIGA****

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I am very grateful for the kind greetings with which you, as the spokesman also for the feelings of the Italian nation, have welcomed me to your residence. I have followed your thoughtful reflections with the utmost attention and have experienced in them your vivid awareness of the responsibilities of your office.

Today's visit to this historic residence of the Quirinal calls to mind two other meetings which have followed upon one another in a brief span of years. The first of these recollections is the one of your recent visit to the Vatican. However, I still have a vivid memory of 2 June 1984, when I was received by your predecessor, Senator Sandro Pertini.

The frequency of these meetings in recent years is certainly due to the coincidence of special circumstances. Nevertheless, the question of their significance cannot be avoided. It is a question which has its general aspects and which acquires importance every time the representatives of the Church meet with the representatives of a state. In the case of Italy, it presents unique and specific characteristics because of a «closeness» which is both geographical and historical, objective and personal. When the Chief Magistrate of the Republic of Italy and the Universal Pastor of the Church meet together, there immediately emerge those grounds for distinction and legitimate autonomy in their respective offices, of mutual respect and loyal cooperation which formed the guiding principle of the Lateran Pact and which were confirmed in the Agreement of 18 February 1984. This Agreement, which applied to the Concordat the modifications necessitated by changed historical and cultural conditions, is intended to foster the tranquil and fruitful exercise of the two powers, which concern persons who are at the same time members of the Church and citizens of the State. As is known, the Second Vatican Council states in this regard: «The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields.

Nevertheless, both are devoted to the personal vocation of man, though under different titles. This service will redound the more effectively to the welfare of all in so far as both institutions practise better cooperation according to the local and prevailing situation» (Const. Gaudium et Spes, 76).

A primary and fundamental significance of today's meeting is, therefore, that of joining in the common affirmation of such principles and in the obligation deriving from them of an ever more harmonious and beneficial cooperation between Church and State in fostering the betterment of man and of society.

2. At the same time, by rendering a visit to the First Citizen of Italy, I wish to carry out a public and proper act of gratitude for the gracious hospitality which citizens and groups, institutions and officials reserve for all those who come to Italy and, in a special way, to Rome for spiritual and religious reasons. In saying this, I am aware that I also am speaking on behalf of my brothers in the episcopate throughout the world.

It is comforting to note how the numerous pilgrims and visitors who come to Rome to «celebrate their Catholic faith find here an atmosphere which is distinguished by its warmth, openness and generosity.

It is a spirit of hospitality which is typical of the Italian nation and which has traditionally characterized its way of life. I am happy on this occasion formally to recognize it once again.

3. Mr. President, the reference to the traditional hospitality of the Italian people almost naturally leads me to extend my remarks to the entire historical heritage of this nation, which has its roots in Christian tradition and is intimately bound to the presence of the Apostolic See. This presence, inasmuch as it calls forth historical reminiscences and providential offices exercised, constitutes a perennial reminder urging us to guard and develop this two thousand year heritage.

The Church is aware of the ancient roots from which many aspects of contemporary society draw their vitality. Because of this, she never tires of reminding nations of their own past as the most authentic source of inspiration for their journey in history. The Italian nation is the recipient and privileged guardian of the inheritance of the Apostles Peter and Paul. It is an intensely spiritual inheritance; that is to say, one which is at once cultural, moral and religious. It is a living inheritance, as is shown not only by the centuries long, uninterrupted witness to holiness, to charity, to human advancement, but also by the creative insertion of the community of believers into contemporary society. It is a heritage, finally, which gives almost a special connotation to Italy's acknowledged contribution to understanding, fraternity and peace among the peoples of the world.

The aforementioned Agreement of 18 February 1984, likewise makes reference to this inheritance when it asserts that the Republic of Italy recognizes « the value of religious education» and takes

into account the fact that « the principles of Catholicism form part of the historical heritage of the Italian nation» (cf. art. 9, 2). These are lofty and enlightening words from which it is necessary and will be necessary constantly to draw inspiration with fidelity and integrity in the solutions of the concrete problems gradually emerging.

4. From such a fertile field of human and Christian values has come the constant impulse for the progress of the nation, which is manifest not only in the areas, albeit noteworthy, of economy and labour, but also in those of political expression, art and education, in the organization of society and in the active participation in the life of the international community.

The results achieved up to this point are worthy of sincere recognition. At the same time, situations and events of a negative character constantly demand active attention and renewed dedication in keeping with the moral inheritance of the nation.

The Church, which is foreign to no people, looks with particular solicitude to contemporary Italy and, in a special way, to the problems in the area of labour, of employment, of the family and of the education of youth. If I make mention of these, it is only in order to show my participation in a concern which I know to be one shared by the leaders of the civil community, and to reaffirm the ready and generous willingness on the part of the ecclesiastical leadership to collaborate in the search for concrete solutions.

Nor am I able to forget the drama of terrorism which once again recently has wounded Italy. This disturbing phenomenon already exceeds all bounds in its explosion of blind violence. Furthermore, in striking at Italy, it is not only directed against innocent victims, but has injured a nation which in its tradition has a lively sensitivity and a sympathetic concern for the victims of difficult or unjust situations.

Mr. President, to you, who represent her in such a worthy manner, I wish to express my wish that Italy, with God's help, may be able to overcome those obstacles which still stand in the way of the full development of her great forces for progress and peace.

It is a wish which takes on special significance in this year in which the Italian nation is preparing to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of the Republic. It is a wish for liberty, for justice, for solidarity, for those values, that is, on which rests the foundation of the state and which, at the same time, form the contribution which other nations await from Italy, especially those nations which only recently have appeared with equal dignity and legitimate aspirations on the stage of the international community.

Finally, it is a wish which I express in prayer, imploring from Almighty God a special blessing for all the citizens of Italy and for those responsible for their destiny.

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