



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
DURANTE LA VISITA UFFICIALE DEL PRESIDENTE
DELLA REPUBBLICA DI MALTA****

Sabato, 4 febbraio 1995

Mr. President,

1. I am glad to extend to you a warm welcome today on the occasion of your first official visit, which gives me the opportunity to express the Holy See's respect and esteem for your person and for the beloved Maltese people. I also offer my deferential greetings to your wife and to all the illustrious members of your entourage.

I treasure in my heart a fond memory of the Pastoral Visit I made to Malta from 25 to 27 May 1990. On that happy occasion, enhanced by the Maltese exquisite sense of hospitality, I was personally able to experience the depth of its faith and its sound Christian roots.

These are indeed ancient roots which date back to apostolic times. It is well known that the proclamation of the Gospel reached the island through the efforts of the Apostle Paul himself, who was shipwrecked there on his voyage to Rome (cf. Acts 27:39-44).

2. That first providential meeting between Christianity and the local inhabitants immediately shed light on their "extraordinary humanity", as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 28:2). The Maltese people have been able to draw on this heritage of "humanity", which the Gospel leaven has brought to maturity whenever they have had to face particularly demanding and challenging times.

Your people's moral fortitude and idealistic pride, Mr. President, can be clearly symbolized by the natural composition of the island itself, for down the centuries its coasts have resisted the atmospheric violence of the winds and tides. It is essential also to draw on this rich heritage of

history and human and Christian civilization today, in order to brave and safely overcome the vicissitudes and adversities which do not even spare the people of our century, on the threshold of the third millennium.

The Island of Malta has a specific vocation to be the opportunity for contact and mutual understanding between the different nations and cultures which are found around the Mediterranean basin. As a historic meeting place between different cultures, set as it is at the hub of the routes ideally connecting Europe to Africa and the Middle East, the Republic of Malta can also make a significant contribution to dialogue and understanding among the Mediterranean peoples in our day.

At a vital time like this, when generous efforts are being made to reach honourable and lasting solutions for peace in the Middle East and in the Balkans, Malta, I am convinced, will not fail to make a specific contribution to creating the necessary climate of respect and collaboration among all the parties involved. This contribution will be all the more effective, the more it is characterized by the values typical of the national identity, such as are inherent in the living tradition of the Maltese people.

3. The Christian heritage which the Maltese have inherited from history and assimilated into their traditions is still the best suited to meet present day challenges and offers the surest framework for satisfactory and lasting solutions. It is particularly a question of protecting the new generations from the false mirage of a hedonistic and consumer culture, often facilitated by the mass media.

In Malta, as I am pleased to point out, a commendable effort is being made to promote a more marked development on the island and a fairer distribution of prosperity among all its citizens. Nevertheless, moral and spiritual values must not be sacrificed for the sake of this. An important expression of these values is the great esteem in which the family is held in the Maltese culture. The Maltese representation offered an unequivocal proof of this esteem at the recent Cairo Conference. It is necessary to continue in this direction, safeguarding the family institution in the face of the many challenges of our time.

4. I would like to express my keen appreciation of the happy conclusion of the negotiations between the Republic of Malta and the Holy See, with which the Bishops of Malta and Gozo have always been associated. The five agreements signed have resolved important issues and have given a start to an up-to-date and sound collaboration between the State and the Church, with respect for the specific competence of each in sectors which concern not only individuals and families but also the whole of society. These sectors are: religious teaching and education in the State schools; the service offered to society as a whole by Church schools, the contribution of the Catholic Faculty of Theology, by its incorporation into the university, to promoting Malta's cultural identity; the regulation of the civil dimension of the married state and of that dimension which arises, at a personal and social level, from marriage celebrated in the Church; a more appropriate

use of the real estate belonging to ecclesiastical institutions.

These are agreements which, despite the necessarily specific character of their content, intend to reflect and to apply, in a correct and fruitful way, essential principles in the relationship between Church and State, in matters of common interest. Amongst other things, these agreements aim to avoid possible tensions if not even conflicts of conscience for Catholics and to encourage the contribution of invaluable energies to the growth of civil life on the part of individuals, families, groups and the whole ecclesial community.

Manifold advantages derive from a country's democratic constitution when, with due respect for the freedom of conscience of each citizen, proper room is made for those who promote basic human values, especially when they are part of the vital fabric of a people's historic and cultural identity.

5. The atmosphere of attention and mutual respect which characterizes relations between the Church and the Government of Malta will undoubtedly contribute to pursuing this objective. I would like to express the hope that the present understanding may increase and foster friendly co-operation between the Christian community and the civil community, with due respect for their complementary roles.

Mr. President, as I again express to you and your illustrious entourage the pleasure I have taken in your visit today, I wish the entire people of the Republic of Malta a future of peace and serene prosperity. I invoke upon them the constant protection of the Virgin Mary, so dear to the Maltese, and gladly impart my Blessing to everyone.

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