



The Holy See

**DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AL PRESIDENTE DEL CONSIGLIO DEI MINISTRI
DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
SUA ECCELLENZA L'ONOREVOLE ROMANO PRODI***

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Mr. President,

1. I am pleased to receive you and offer you my cordial welcome on the occasion of the official visit you are paying me at the beginning of the lofty task with which you have been entrusted by the Head of State and the confidence of Parliament.

Your welcome presence gives me the opportunity to address – my thoughts to the Italian nation, which is among the primary concerns of my pastoral ministry. I still vividly recall the «Great Prayer for Italy», which guided the progress of the Italian Ecclesial Community in 1994, and even if, as a specific initiative, it has ended, it does not cease to resound in the conscience of all those who believe that the destiny of peoples, no less than that of individuals, is in the hands of divine Providence. That spiritual mobilization, to which the "Great Prayer" referred, must not be lacking but must continue to sustain the responsible commitment of all lay Christians committed to serving the good of their country.

2. During the recent Ecclesial Convention in Palermo, while reaffirming «my deep trust in the Italian people», I said «they will be able to find, in the heritage of wisdom and courage at their disposal, the necessary resources for overcoming their present difficult situation» (n. 6; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 6 Dec. 1995, p. 11).

I am pleased to recall these words here, since this year is the 50th anniversary of the Republic and people remember the beginning of the work that led to the promulgation of the Constitution, of which the Lateran Pacts were an integral part. Appropriately updated, they continue to guarantee

respectful and worthwhile co-operation between the political and ecclesial communities.

In commemorating the events of 50 years ago, on various sides attention has been drawn to the confidence with which the members of the Constitutive Assembly, in the noble intention of helping Italy to recover from the terrible disaster of the war, marked out paths of high ethical and civil value to its citizens, engaging them all to work for the dignity and liberty of each individual with respect for the juridical principles which, down the centuries, have made the Italian nation great.

The years that followed were marked by great enthusiasm in intentions and activities. Among the political leaders who took up the task of putting into effect the principles written into the Constitution were men of exceptional moral calibre who were able to dedicate their energies to the service of the whole country, starting with the poorest classes. It was also due to them that Italy's name returned to being honoured and respected in the international community.

These are events from which a precise warning springs, together with an invitation to optimism and hope: the search for the common good will be fruitful and effective to the extent that it is sustained by a convinced commitment in favour of moral and spiritual values, which are at the root of any true progress for the nation.

It is in this perspective that I consider my duty to emphasize several basic requirements which are felt particularly by Italian Catholics.

The first of these is the duty to promote the dignity of the person by means of social structures which are more respectful of the truth about man and of the defence of every individual's right to life from conception to natural death.

The other requirement was effectively expressed by the Italian Episcopal Conference, which recently expressed their hope for an «organic» policy in favour of the family as a natural society based on marriage, recognizing its valuable role in the country's social fabric. A policy which, attentive above all to the needs of the less fortunate, also includes the promotion of that combination of conditions, first of all steady employment, which are proving necessary if motherhood and child-raising are not to be penalized.

With regard to this commitment, I wish to repeat the appeal I made on 28 April "that in Italy too an effective and fair integrated school system which includes both state and private institutions be achieved". Effective scholastic parity is a question of justice for so many Italian families and numerous religious institutes dedicated to training young people, but it is also a form of investment in Italy's future. by making the most of the positive contributions of both to the growth of its cultural and spiritual heritage.

4. Mr. President, I hope that the government you lead can consistently and successfully pursue

the great objectives on which the country's authentic development depends. I would particularly like to express the wish that its collaboration with the Holy See will continue and increase in preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 an eminently spiritual event which will see pilgrims from all over the world coming to Rome and Italy.

To achieve these important goals, I am pleased to confirm, Mr. President, the ready availability of the Holy See, which has been and continues to be particularly concerned about "reciprocal collaboration for the advancement of man and of the well-being of the country" (art. I of the Revised Agreement of 1984; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 27 Feb. 1984, p.3).

With these sentiments, Mr. President, I offer you my cordial wishes for fruitful and tranquil work at the service of the Italian people, upon whom I invoke constant divine assistance, as I impart my Blessing to all as a sign of my deep, continued affection.

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