



The Holy See

***MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO CARDINAL ANGELO BAGNASCO
PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE***

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

On the occasion of the 60th General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference, I am particularly pleased to send my affectionate greeting to you, to the Secretary of the CEI and to all the Pastors of the Church in Italy, who are meeting in Assisi, the city symbolic of Christian life lived "according to the form" of the Gospel, embodied in the lives of St Francis and St Clare who continue to exercise an irresistible spiritual fascination in Italy and throughout the world. Present in spirit, I express my spiritual closeness to everyone, familiar with the zeal with which you, venerable and dear Brothers, work daily at the service of the communities entrusted to your pastoral care. On the Apostolic Visits I make to Italian dioceses, as well as on other occasions that bring me into contact with the beloved Church in Italy, I meet lively communities, firmly bound to the Successor of Peter and in reciprocal communion. For this reason, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Eph 1: 16), together with the priests, your most important collaborators in the apostolate, as well as the deacons, the religious and the lay faithful who share in your joy and your responsibility as witnesses of Christ in every context of Italian society. These regular meetings I am sure of it foster your reciprocal cooperation that is indispensable if you are to carry out the mandate that distinguishes your apostolic action, to: increase in the Christian people faith, hope and charity; foster relations with other religious communities and with the civil authorities; work for the presence of Gospel leaven in the culture and fabric of Italian society, for the protection of human life, for the promotion of peace and justice and for the safeguard of creation. The fraternal exchanges that characterize the work of your Assembly give strength and vitality to your common commitment to the one Church of Christ and to the development of the human fabric of society.

Several months have passed since [our meeting at the General Assembly](#) held in May at which it was decided that education would be the fundamental perspective of the pastoral approach for the coming decade. The emergence of the educational structure is a sign of the times that challenges the whole of Italy to put the formation of the new generations, at the centre of the attention and efforts of each person in accordance with his/her respective responsibilities and in the framework of a broad convergence of intentions. As I recalled in my [Discourse last 28 May](#), education, "a constitutive and ongoing requirement in the Church's life" ([Address to members of the CEI at their Annual General Assembly](#), 28 May 2009), is placed at the heart of her mission which aims to ensure that every person is able to encounter and follow the Lord Jesus, the Way that leads to authentic love, the Truth that satisfies our needs, and the Life of the world. The educational challenge runs through all the sectors of the Church and requires each of them to face with determination the great questions of our time: the question concerning the nature of the human being and human dignity a crucial element for a complete formation of the person and the "question of God", which seems particularly urgent in our day. In this regard, I would like to recall what I said [last 24 July at the celebration of Vespers in the Cathedral of Aosta](#): "If the fundamental relationship, that with God, is not living, is not lived, then no other relationship can find its right form. But this is also true for society, for humanity as such. Here too, if God is missing, if God is discounted, if he is absent, then the compass is lacking which would show the way forward, the direction to follow in relationships as a whole. God! We must bring the reality of God back into our world, make him known and present".

For this to happen, Dear Brother Bishops, we must become a living adoration with our whole being, a gift that transforms the world and restores it to God. This is the profound message of the [Year for Priests](#) which is an extraordinary opportunity to go to the heart of the ordained ministry, leading each priest, his identity and mission, back to unity. I am glad to see that this special proposal is giving rise to many projects in your Dioceses, especially spiritual and vocational initiatives, and that it is contributing to shedding light on the path of holiness marked out in time by so many Italian Bishops and priests. Indeed Italy's history is also the history of an innumerable throng of priests who bent over the wounds of a straying and suffering humanity, making of themselves an offering of salvation. I hope you will be able to gather abundant fruit from this unanimous prayer and meditation on the gift of the priesthood, which flowed from Christ's heart for the salvation of the world.

Another theme to which your Assembly will give plenty of time is the "Question of Southern Italy". Twenty years after the publication of the Document: "Sviluppo nella solidarietà. Chiesa italiana e Mezzogiorno" [Development in solidarity. The Italian Church and the South of Italy], you feel the need to make yourselves responsible for voicing the needs of a country that will not develop unless it develops as a whole. In the regions of the South, the Church's presence is a seed of personal and social renewal and of integral development. May the Lord bless the efforts of those who work, with the tenacious power of good, for the transformation of consciences and the defence of the truth of the human being and of society.

Further, the new Italian edition of the Funeral Rite will be examined during your Assembly. It comes in response to the need to combine fidelity to the original Latin with the appropriate adaptations to the national situation, bearing in mind the experience and development that followed the Second Vatican Council, with an attentive look at the changed social and cultural context and the requirements of the new evangelization. The Funeral Rite affords an important opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of hope and to demonstrate the motherhood of the Church. The God who "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" is the One who "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more" (*Rev* 21: 4). In a culture that strives to remove the thought of death, if it does not actually seek to exorcise it, reducing it to a spectacle or transforming it into a right, it is the task of believers to shine the light of Christian revelation on this mystery, certain that "that love can reach into the afterlife, that reciprocal giving and receiving is possible, in which our affection for one another continues" (*Spe Salvi*, n. 48).

Your Eminence and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, 50 years ago, at the end of the 16th National Eucharistic Congress and after an extraordinary *Peregrinatio Mariae*, the Italian Bishops wanted to consecrate Italy to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. You will be commemorating this most important and fruitful action, strengthening the very special bond of affection and devotion that binds the Italian People to the heavenly Mother of the Lord. I willingly join in this commemoration, entrusting the work of your Assembly, the Church in Italy, and the entire nation to the motherly protection of the Virgin Mary, Queen of Angels and the purest image of the Church. I invoke her intercession, together with that of St Francis and St Clare of Assisi and of all the Saints of Italy. With these sentiments I cordially impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, to the Bishops, to their collaborators and to all who are present.

From the Vatican, 4 November 2009

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