



## The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. Mr. ANTONIO ZANARDI LANDI  
NEW AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO THE HOLY SEE\****

*Thursday, 4 October 2007*

*Mr Ambassador,*

I readily accept the Letters with which the President of the Republic of Italy accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. On this happy occasion, enhanced by today's Feast of St Francis of Assisi, Patron of Italy, I am pleased to offer you my cordial welcome. As you have pointed out, relations between the Holy See and the Italian Nation are distinguished by close bonds of cooperation, expressed in many ways. It suffices to mention the unanimous testimony of acceptance, spiritual support and friendship which Italians reserve for the Supreme Pontiff at meetings with him and during his Visits to Rome and other cities of the Peninsula.

This closeness is an expression of the special bond that has long united Italy to the Successor of the Apostle Peter, whose See - through one of God's mysterious and providential plans - is located precisely within the context of this Country.

Mr Ambassador, I would like to thank you for conveying a greeting to me from the President of the Republic, to whom I am grateful for the sentiments of respect which he has had occasion to express to me in various circumstances. I reciprocate his greeting, with the additional wish that the Italian People, faithful to the principles that have inspired their journey in the past, may also be able in this age, marked by immense and profound changes, to continue to forge ahead on the path of authentic progress. Thus, may Italy be able to make a precious contribution to the International Community, promoting those human and Christian values which constitute an indispensable spiritual patrimony and have given life to its culture as well as to its civil and religious history. For her part, just as she did in the past, the Catholic Church will not cease to offer her specific contribution to civil society, promoting and exalting everything in it that is true, good and beautiful, illuminating all the areas of human activity with means that are in conformity with the Gospel and in harmony with the common good, in keeping with the different times and situations.

In this way, in fact, the principle is realized which was spelled out by the Second Vatican Council and explains that "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" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76). This principle, also authoritatively presented by the Constitution of the Italian Republic (cf. art. 7), constitutes the basis for relations between the Holy See and the Italian State and is reaffirmed in the Agreement that amended the Lateran Pact in 1984. Both the independence and the sovereignty of the State and the Church, as well as their reciprocal collaboration for the advancement of humanity and the good of the entire national community, are therefore reaffirmed in it. In pursuing this aim, the Church is neither proposing goals of power for herself nor claiming privileges or aspiring to advantageous social or financial positions. Her sole purpose is to serve men and women, drawing inspiration as the supreme norm for her conduct from the words and example of Jesus Christ, who "went about doing good and healing all" (Acts 10: 38).

Consequently, the Catholic Church asks consideration for her specific nature; she also asks to be able to carry out freely her special mission for the good of not only her own faithful but of all Italians.

For this very reason, as I had the opportunity to say last year on the occasion of the Ecclesial Convention in Verona: "The Church, therefore, is not and does not intend to be a political agent. At the same time, she has a profound interest in the good of the political community, whose soul is justice, and offers it her specific contribution at a double level". And I added: "Christian faith purifies reason and helps it to be better: as a result, with its social doctrine, whose argument begins from what is conformed to the nature of every human being, the Church's contribution is to enable whatever is just to be effectively recognized and then also accomplished. "To this end, moral and spiritual energies are clearly indispensable as they ensure that the demands of justice are put before personal interests, a social category or even a State. For the Church, here again, there is ample space to root these energies in the conscience to nourish them and fortify them" (*Address to Participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention*, Verona, 19 October 2006; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 25 October, p. 9). I warmly express the hope that collaboration among all members of the esteemed Nation you represent will not only contribute to jealously preserving the cultural and spiritual heritage which is its distinguishing feature and an integral part of its history, but also will be an even greater incentive to seeking new ways to face adequately the great challenges that mark the post-modern age. Among them, I limit myself to citing the defence of human life in all its stages, the safeguard of all the rights of the individual and of the family, the construction of a world with solidarity, respect for creation, and intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

In this regard, Mr Ambassador, you have wished to emphasize that the harmony of relations between the State and the Church has made it possible to achieve important goals in promoting an integral humanism. Of course, much still remains to be done. The 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, which occurs next year, will be a favourable opportunity for Italy to

make its contribution to the creation, in the international sphere, of a just order whose centre will always be respect for the human being, his dignity and his inalienable rights. I referred to this in my [Message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace](#) this year, saying: "That Declaration is regarded as a sort of *moral commitment assumed by all mankind*. There is a profound truth to this, especially if the rights described in the Declaration are held to be based not simply on the decisions of the assembly that approved them, but on man's very nature and his inalienable dignity as a person created by God". I then noted that "it is important for international agencies not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights. This would enable them to avoid the risk, unfortunately ever-present, of sliding towards a merely positivistic interpretation of those rights. Were that to happen, the international bodies would end up lacking the necessary authority to carry out their role as defenders of the fundamental rights of the human person and of peoples, the chief justification for their very existence and activity" ([Message for World Day of Peace 2007](#), n. 13; *ORE*, 20 December 2006, p. 7). Italy, by virtue of its recent election as a member of the Human Rights Council and even more because of its special tradition of humanity and generosity, cannot fail to feel involved in a task of tirelessly constructing peace and in the defence of human dignity and of all inalienable human rights, including that of religious freedom.

Mr Ambassador, as I conclude my reflections, I would like to assure you of the esteem and support of my collaborators, so that you may accomplish successfully the lofty mission which has been entrusted to you. To this end, I invoke the heavenly intercession of the "Poverello" of Assisi, of St Catherine of Siena and especially of the motherly protection of Mary, "Chatelaine of Italy", while I am pleased to impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, your family and the beloved Italian People.

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