



The Holy See

CONCERT OFFERED BY PRESIDENT GIORGIO NAPOLITANO
OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC IN HONOUR
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI ON THE OCCASION
OF THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF PONTIFICATE **ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT
XVI**
Paul VI Audience Hall

Thursday, 24 April 2008 Mr President,

Your Eminences,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Ladies and Gentlemen, At the end of this splendid concert, I am pleased to address a cordial greeting to all of you who have taken part: Civil and Military Authorities, distinguished Figures and friends who have come to share this moment of high cultural value. I would especially like to express my deep gratitude to the Honourable Giorgio Napolitano, President of the Italian Republic, who on the occasion of the third anniversary of my Pontificate has wished to offer me this gift, accompanying it with courteous words which I much appreciated. Thank you, Mr President, for this respectful and caring gesture which I welcomed with deep pleasure! I see it as a further sign of the great affection the Italian People have for the Pope. I extend my greeting to your gracious wife and to your collaborators. Certain of interpreting the sentiments of everyone present, I address my heartfelt congratulations to the "Giuseppe Verde" Symphony Orchestra and Choir of Milan, beautifully conducted by Mr Oleg Caetani, who have played and sung with extraordinary talent and effectiveness. I likewise extend my appreciation to the conductor of the Choir, Ms Erina Gambarini. I express a cordial thought of gratitude to the directors of the praiseworthy "Giuseppe Verdi" Foundation, encouraging them to continue on the prestigious path of art and culture on which they have set out, whose value, as I know, is also enhanced by their commitment to bring music to alleviate situations of human difficulty, such as those that occur in hospitals and prisons. My gratitude is naturally addressed to all who have contributed to the organization and realization of this evocative event, supporting it in different ways. We have had the joy of listening with attentive participation to demanding compositions by Luciano Berio, Johannes Brahms and Ludwig van Beethoven. I would like to emphasize that the music of Brahms enriched with religious trust Hölderlin's "Song of Destiny". This factor introduces consideration of the spiritual value of the art of music, uniquely called to instil hope in the human spirit, so scarred and sometimes wounded by the earthly condition. There is a mysterious and deep kinship between music and hope, between song and eternal life: not for nothing does the Christian tradition portray the Blessed in

the act of singing in a choir, in ecstasy and enraptured by the beauty of God. But authentic art, like prayer, is not foreign to everyday reality although it requires us to "water" it and make it germinate if it is to bring forth the fruit of goodness and peace. The masterful interpretations we have heard also remind us of the value and universal importance of the artistic heritage. I am thinking especially of the young generations, who can approach this heritage with ever new inspiration in order to build the world in accordance with works of justice and solidarity at the service of humanity, by employing the multiform expressions of world culture. I am also thinking of the importance for young peoples' formation of education in authentic beauty. Art overall helps to refine their minds and orients them to building a society open to spiritual ideals.

In this regard, Italy, with its exceptional artistic heritage, can play an important role in the world: in fact, the quantity and quality of the monuments and artworks it possesses make it a universal "messenger" of all the values that art expresses and at the same time promotes. The festivity of song and music are likewise a constant invitation to believers and people of good will to commit themselves to giving humanity a future rich in hope. Mr President of the Republic, thank you again for the wonderful present you have wished to offer me and for the sentiments that have accompanied it. I reciprocate them, assuring you of my remembrance in prayer that the Lord may protect you, your gracious wife, the Authorities and the entire People of Italy. With these wishes which I entrust to the intercession of Our Lady of Good Counsel, I invoke God's Blessing on all those present and on their respective families. Thank you and good evening to you all!