



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MILAN

AND 7th WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES

(1-3 JUNE 2012)

MEETING WITH GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI

Hall of the Throne at the Archbishopric of Milan

Saturday, 2 June 2012

[Video]

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I sincerely thank you for this meeting which reveals your sentiments of respect and esteem for the Apostolic See. At the same time, it permits me, as Pastor of the universal Church, to express my appreciation to you of the prompt and praiseworthy work you never cease to promote for the ever greater civil, social and economic well-being of the hard-working populations of Milan and Lombardy. I thank Cardinal Angelo Scola who has introduced this event. In addressing my respectful and cordial greeting to you, my thoughts turn to the man who was your illustrious predecessor, St Ambrose, governor — *consularis* — of the Provinces of *Liguria* and *Aemilia*, with headquarters in the imperial city of Milan, a crossroads and — as we might say today — a European reference point. Before being elected Bishop of *Mediolanum*, in an unexpected way and absolutely against his wishes because he felt unprepared, he had been in charge of public order and had administered justice there. The words with which the Prefect Probo invited him as *consularis* to Milan, told him in fact, “Go and administer, not as a judge but as a bishop”. And he was effectively a balanced and illuminated governor who was able to face matters with wisdom, good sense and authority, knowing how to overcome differences and settle disputes. I would like to reflect briefly on certain principles which he followed and which are still precious for those who

are called to govern public affairs.

In his comment on Luke's Gospel, St Ambrose recalls that "the institution of power so clearly derives from God that the person who exercises it is himself a *minister of God*" (*Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam*, IV, 29). These words might seem strange to people of the third millennium, and yet they clearly indicate a central truth about the human person which forms the solid foundation of social coexistence: no human power can be considered divine, hence no human being is the master of any other human being. Ambrose courageously reminded the Emperor of this, writing to him, "Even you, august Emperor, are a man" (*Epistula* 51, 11).

We can draw another element from St Ambrose's teaching. The first quality of whoever governs is *justice*, a public virtue par excellence, because it concerns the good of the entire community. And yet it does not suffice. Ambrose accompanies it with another quality: *love for freedom*, which he considers an element to discriminate between good and bad governors, since, as one reads in another letter of his "the good love freedom, reprobates love servitude" (*Epistula* 40, 2). Freedom is not a privilege for the few but a right for all, a valuable right which the civil power must guarantee. Yet, freedom does not signify the arbitrary power of the individual but rather implies the responsibility of each one. Herein lies one of the principal elements of the *secularism of the State*: to guarantee freedom so that all may propose their own vision of common life, always, however, with respect for the other and in the context of the laws that aim for the good of all.

Moreover, to the extent that the concept of a confessional State is out of date, it seems in any case clear that its laws must find justification and force in natural law, which is the basis of an order in conformity with the dignity of the human person, surmounting a merely positivist understanding from which no ethical indication of any kind can be derived (cf. [*Discourse to the German Parliament, 22 September 2011*](#)). The State is at the service of the person whose "*well-being*" it safeguards in its many aspects, starting with the right to life, whose deliberate suppression may never be permitted. Each one, therefore, can see that legislation and the work of State institutions must be in particular at the service of the family, founded on marriage and open to life, and likewise recognize the primary right of parents to choose how to educate and raise their children, in accordance with the educational programme that they consider valid and suitable. No justice is done to families if the State does not support freedom of education for the common good of the entire society.

In the State's existence for its citizens, a constructive collaboration with the Church appears to be invaluable. This is certainly not to confuse the different and distinct aims and roles of the civil authority and of the Church herself but for the contribution that the latter has offered and can still offer to society with her experience, her teaching, her tradition, her institutions and her works with which she has placed herself at the service of the people. It suffices to think of the splendid array of Saints devoted to charity, the school and to culture, of the care of the sick and the marginalized, served and loved as the Lord is served and loved. This tradition continues to bear fruit: the

diligence of Lombard Christians in these sectors is very much alive and perhaps even more important than in the past. Christian communities promote these actions not so much by supporting them but rather as a freely-given superabundance of Christ's love and of the totalizing experience of their faith. The period of crisis we are passing through needs free giving, in addition to courageous technological and political decisions, as I have had the opportunity to recall: "The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion" (Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 6).

We can gather yet another precious invitation from St Ambrose, whose solemn and admonitory figure is reproduced on the standard of the City of Milan. St Ambrose asks those who wish to serve in the government and in the public administration to make themselves loved. In his work *De Officiis* he declares: "what love does can never be achieved by fear. Nothing is as useful as making oneself loved" (II, 29). However, the reason which in turn motivates and stimulates your hard-working and diligent presence in the various spheres of public life cannot but be the will to dedicate yourselves to the good of the citizens, hence a clear expression and an evident sign of love. In this way, politics are deeply ennobled, becoming a lofty form of charity.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, please accept my simple reflections as a sign of my high esteem for the institutions you serve and for your important work. May you be assisted in your task by the constant protection of Heaven, of which the Apostolic Blessing I impart to you, to your collaborators and to your families, intends to be a pledge and a sign. Thank you.