



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS  
IN THE 47th SOCIAL WEEK OF ITALIAN CATHOLICS**  
[Turin, 12-15 September 2013]

*To my Venerable Brother  
Cardinal ANGELO BAGNASCO  
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

I address my cordial greeting to you and to all the participants in the 47th Social Week of Italian Catholics, convoked in Turin. I renew my brotherly embrace to the Bishops present, and in particular to the Pastor of this Church, Archbishop Cesare Nosiglia, as well as to Archbishop Arrigo Miglio, and to the members of the Scientific and Organizational Committee. I greet all the representatives of the Dioceses of Italy and of the various Church groups.

The tradition of Social Weeks in Italy began in 1907. Blessed Giuseppe Toniolo was one of their principal sponsors. This 47th Week is the first to be held after his beatification on 28 April 2012 and has rightly been entrusted to his special intercession. Blessed Toniolo belongs to that splendid array of lay Catholics who, despite the difficulties of their time, wanted and were able, with God's help, to take the best roads to further the task of seeking and building the common good. With their life and thought they put into practice what the Second Vatican Council taught later with regard to the vocation and mission of the laity (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 31). Their example is an ever valid encouragement for lay Catholics today to seek in their turn effective ways to achieve the same end in the light of the Church's most recent teaching (cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 28). The exemplary force of holiness in the social arena is made even more tangible in this case by the venue of this 47th Social Week. Indeed, Turin is an emblematic city for the entire historical and social development of Italy and is so in a special way because of the Church's presence in this development. In the 18th and 19th centuries a great number of men and women were active in Turin: priests, religious, lay people — several of whom are Saints and Blesseds — who witnessed with their life and worked effectively

with their institutions at the service of youth, families and the poorest people.

The Social Weeks of Italian Catholics, in the different periods of history, were providential and invaluable as they still are today. In fact they are proposed as a high-profile cultural and ecclesial initiative which can face, and if possible anticipate, the at times radical questions and challenges posed by the evolution of society today. For this reason 25 years ago the Church in Italy chose to take up the Social Weeks and to relaunch them as good opportunities for listening and research, for exchanges and for the deepening of knowledge. They are very important to the ecclesial community itself and its service of evangelization and human advancement, as well as to scholars and to those who work in the cultural and social sectors (cf. *Nota Pastorale CEI*, 20 November 1988). The Social Weeks are thus a privileged means by which the Church in Italy makes her own contribution to the country's search for the common good (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 26). This undertaking, which is incumbent on the entire community in its different categories, belongs specifically, as we have said, to lay people and is their responsibility.

The theme of this Social Week is "The Family, Hope and a Future for Italian Society". I express my full appreciation of this decision and for choosing to associate the family with the notion of hope and a future. It is exactly this! However, for the Christian community the family is far more than a "theme": it is life, it is the daily fabric of life, it is the journey of generations who pass on the faith together with love and with the basic moral values. It is concrete solidarity, effort, patience, and also a project, hope, a future. All this which the Christian community lives out in the light of faith, hope and charity, should never be kept to oneself but must become, every day, the leaven in the dough of the whole of society for its greater common good (cf. *ibid.*, n. 47)

Hope and a future presuppose memory. The memory of our elderly people sustains us as we journey on. The future of society, and precisely of Italian society, is rooted in the elderly and in the young: the latter, because they have the strength and are of the age to carry history ahead; the former, because they are a living memory. A people that does not take care of its elderly, its children and its youth has no future, because it abuses both memory and promise.

The 47th Social Week, together with the preparatory document that preceded it, fits into this perspective. It intends to offer a witness and propose reflection, discernment, without prejudice, as open as possible and taking into account the human and social sciences. First of all as Church we offer a concept of family, which is that of the Book of Genesis. It is a concept of unity in the difference between a man and a woman, and of its fecundity. Besides, in this situation we recognize a good for all, the first natural society, as it is seen in the Constitution of the Italian Republic. Lastly, we wish to reaffirm that the family, seen in this way, remains the first and principle builder of society and of an economy on a human scale. And as such it deserves to be effectively supported. In the first place, the positive or negative consequences of cultural, but also of political, decisions concerning the family affect the various sectors of the life of a society and of

a country. They range from the demographic problem — which is a serious threat to the whole of the continent of Europe, and to Italy in particular — to other concerns related to work and to the economy in general, to the development of children and to matters that even concern the anthropological vision fundamental to our civilization (cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 44).

These reflections do not only concern believers but all people of good will, all those who have at heart the common good of the country, as is the case for problems of environmental ecology that can greatly help us to understand those of “an ecology of man” (cf. *ibid.*, *Address to the Bundestag*, Berlin, Germany, 22 September 2011). The family is the privileged school for learning generosity, sharing, responsibility, a school that teaches how to overcome a certain individualistic mind-set which has worked its way into our societies. Sustaining and promoting families, making the most of their fundamental and central role means working for a just and supportive development.

We cannot ignore the hardship of many families that is due to unemployment, the problem of housing, the practical impossibility of freely choosing their own educational curriculum; the suffering that is also due to internal conflicts within families, to the failures of the conjugal and family experience and to the violence that unfortunately lurks in families and wreaks havoc even in our homes. We owe it to all and wish to be particularly close to them with respect and with a true sense of brotherhood and solidarity. However, we want above all to remember the simple but beautiful and brave testimony of so many families who joyfully live the experience of marriage and parenthood enlightened and sustained by the Lord’s grace and fearlessly face even moments of the cross. Lived in union with the Cross of the Lord, the cross does not hinder the path of love but on the contrary can make it stronger and fuller.

May this Social Week contribute effectively to highlighting the bond that unites the common good to the advancement of families founded on marriage, over and above prejudices and ideologies. It is a debt of hope which everyone has to their country, especially young people, to whom we must offer hope for the future. To you, dear Brother and to the great gathering of the Social Week in Turin, I assure my remembrance in prayer and as I ask for prayer for me too, and for my service to the Church, I warmly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 11 September 2013*

**FRANCIS**

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