



The Holy See

VISITA PASTORALE IN AUSTRIA

INCONTRO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II CON IL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA AUSTRIACA, IL SIGNOR RUDOLF KIRCHSCHLÄGER

Palazzo della Hofburg di Vienna

Domenica, 11 settembre 1983

1. It is a particular honour and pleasure for me to meet today the Federal President, members of the Federal government and representatives of Austria's political and cultural life. For a long time I have known Austria from personal experience and bonds of friendship.

Only a few days after my appointment to the Apostolic See I received a kind invitation to visit your country. This visit has now become a reality. Dear Federal President, I should like to express my sincere thanks for this invitation, for the opportunity of meeting you today, and for the respectful words of your welcome. At the same time I should like to thank the Federal government and all those in Vienna and throughout Austria who through their efforts have contributed to the excellent preparation and organization of my stay in this country. In particular, I should like to thank all of you for the cordial welcome I have received. By greeting you, the highest and most distinguished representatives of your country, I am addressing myself to all of those responsible for the well-being and destiny of this nation. At this hour I should also like to express my admiration for your country's decisive role in history, its cultural wealth and world esteem which Austria has always maintained within the community of nations. At this hour and with particular gratitude I should like to call to mind that Christianity has been deeply rooted in the Austrian people for a millennium and that the friendly relations between your country and the Holy See reach far back into history.

Much time has elapsed since a Pope last paid a visit to Vienna. I am grateful to the Lord that the circumstances of the present pastoral visit are different from those under which Pope Pius VI came to your capital 200 years ago. In those days there was cause for great concern about the

unity of the Church and its autonomy in this country. Today religious life is free to develop without restraint, the Katholikentag in itself demonstrates this eloquently. It was a great joy for me to be able to participate in it. The message of Christ was brought to the people of this country as an impressive testimony of living hope, which may inspire hope in many others.

2. It is the mission of the Church to perform a religious and spiritual task in this world, not a political one. But it is for the sake of the Gospel entrusted to it that the Church also proclaims, as the Second Vatican Council emphasizes, «the rights of man. She acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are everywhere fostered» (Gaudium et Spes, no. 41). Consequently, the Church is satisfied with and grateful for the efforts made by states like the Republic of Austria, which on the basis of their fundamental democratic order and inspired by the brotherly spirit of their citizens, espouse the cause of human rights. I refer not only to the orderly conduct of public life and to endeavours to safeguard fundamental human rights in one's own country, but also to the willingness of a nation to open its boundaries to people from other countries who are deprived of the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech and respect for human dignity. Austria has, time and again, generously granted asylum to such people. In so doing, this country manifests its respect for the personal freedom of man, which is an inalienable right of any human being.

At this Point I should like to address a word of special appreciation and encouragement to Austria for the way in which this country fulfils its tasks both at the European and the international level. As in the past, so today Austria seeks, in many instances, to build bridges between nations. Conscious of Europe's common tasks and its responsibility within the community of nations, Austria has always endeavoured to make a contribution towards safeguarding peace and promoting the understanding between nations and power blocs. It will be necessary to continue these efforts resolutely and to focus even more clearly on the objectives set.

For many years concern for international justice has prompted numerous moves designed to promote the development of the poorest regions of the planet. I am pleased to note that development aid given by the Church plays a significant role in these endeavours. Despite all efforts, the gap between the rich and the poor is still widening. This fact must spur on all those within Church and State to intensify their efforts; this may also lead to sweeping changes in the world economic system. The same applies to our concern for international understanding and the safeguarding of world peace. In view of its geographical position and cultural heritage, your country has excellent chances of fostering an even more intensive human and cultural exchange and of promoting meetings and dialogues between nations even more effectively.

3. The Catholic Church is always ready to actively support the commitment of states to promoting the well-being of men and nations. By reason of its all-embracing apostolic mission, the Church feels called upon to serve mankind publicly. This holds particularly true for a country whose history and culture have been profoundly shaped by Christianity and in which many citizens profess their

Christian faith.

The Church is not a political institution. It has no authority over technology or economic policy, and it does not thrive on power politics either. The Church respects the responsibility of the state, without interfering with its political tasks. Thus it derives even greater authority to bear the banner of true freedom, the banner of the inalienable rights of man, of his dignity and divine mission. In the name of true freedom and human dignity, the Church primarily has the task of standing up for moral conscience and responsible ethical action not only on the part of individuals but also in society. It is this permanent spiritual mission which motivates the Church, in cooperating with national governments, to deal resolutely with the contemporary concerns of man, to advocate justice, peace, and coexistence in human dignity, and to uphold morality within both the family and the society. This concrete task of the Church appears even more urgent at a time when blatant disregard for the fundamental human values erodes the very foundations on which our society rests, and endangers the innermost dignity of man. The modern pluralist state cannot forgo ethical standards in legislation and public life without causing severe damage to individual well-being and the good of society as a whole. This is true, in particular, in areas where cherished values such as respect for human life in all its phases must be protected. The Church expresses its solidarity with, and appreciation for, all of those who, out of personal conviction, defend the fundamental ethical values in present-day society and who especially seek to convince young people that this is a binding obligation for them. At this point I should like, as a sign of my great appreciation for you, to state expressly that you, dear Federal President, have always openly and emphatically served this cause in your high office. For this and all the efforts you have so nobly made to support the work of the Church and the Holy See, I should like to express my sincere thanks.

4. In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, please allow me to make to you, too, a few more personal remarks. You who are gathered here have been appointed to your political office by the Austrian people in free and democratic elections or have been entrusted with your social function on the basis of such an appointment. You bear a very great responsibility for this country and its position in the world. Your honourable yet difficult occupation in politics requires the commitment of all of your strength and personal efforts. Those of you who have been given the gift of faith will know that one may and should ask for God's help. May you all be given the spiritual and moral strength to live up to the high expectations that society, and especially youth, place in politicians today more than ever before.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen,

I am most grateful to you that you pay respect to the Christian view of the world and to the dialogue in partnership with the Church in accordance with your own personal convictions. May you also take full account of this in your efforts for the well-being of your people. For you, for the «much praised, much tried, much beloved Austria» (Austrian national anthem) and for all the people who live here I ask the constant protection and blessing of the almighty and merciful God.

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