



The Holy See

DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II

AL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA SANDRO PERTINI**Lunedì, 21 maggio 1984*

1. With a deep sense of respect and esteem I extend my cordial welcome to you, Mr president, thanking you for this solemn visit with which you, as Head of the Italian State and representative of national unity, have wished to honour the Successor of Peter. It is not our first meeting. Other times, in a more informal setting, we have already had the occasion to meet together and to exchange the thoughts and hopes which were on our minds. Among our meetings I cannot but recall the visits which you, Mr President, wished to make to me three years ago, precisely in this month, remaining beside my hospital bed in brotherly concern for my endangered life. I also address a greeting to the President of the Council of Ministers, the Honourable Bettino Craxi; to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable Giulio Andreotti; and to the other distinguished persons who have accompanied you.

2. May it also be permitted to this Pope, «come from afar», to express, beyond due and sincere respect, the special sentiments which inspire him in officially receiving the highest representative of that nation which, among all others, because of geographical position and because of common life and history, is closest to the See of Peter. Indeed, since the time when the Fisherman of Galilee landed in the heart of the Roman Empire, Italy has been united with special bonds, and no less so today than during past centuries, to the Catholic Church and to this Apostolic See because of a long series of historical, geographical and cultural reasons. In addition, the incomparable patrimony of ancient civilization, of culture and of art – in which the Christian and universal component is so alive and predominant – attracts the admiring gaze of other peoples to the Italian nation. I myself began to know and to love this nation in the classroom during my early years of humanistic studies in Poland; then, more directly, during the course of my philosophical and theological training in Rome. My ties with the city became especially close when Paul VI numbered me among the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church; but they took on a new nature when, through the inscrutable divine plan, I became united to the Church of Rome with the responsibility of the first among the brethren and servant of the servants of God. As Bishop of this Apostolic See and primate of Italy, in union of thought and heart with all the Italian bishops, I feel that I share the lot, the joys as well as the sufferings, of all the people of Italy. I am a concern which has been always constant in the Roman pontiffs, from Gregory the Great to Pius XII, who precisely forty years ago worked to defend and to aid the persecuted and the entire Roman populace. In the wake of this tradition, I wish to express before you, Mr President, my profound affection for the Italian people, who daily attest to so many spiritual and moral values, confronting sorrowful events such as the unfortunately recurring earthquakes and economic and social situations which are not easy. I have also been able to have personal experience of these values, both during my various pastoral journeys along the peninsula, during which I always receive a warm and affectionate welcome, and during the meetings I have here in Rome with pilgrimages coming from dioceses and parishes from the various regions of Italy. They are values which are nourished by a Christian tradition which has deep roots in broad sections of the population. The love which binds me to this country inspires me to wish that all its best efforts may be combined in the commitment to

safeguard that spiritual patrimony which constitutes its truest wealth. It is by drawing on that heritage that the Italian people have been able to confront the great trials of history. And it is still thanks to it that during more recent years it has been able to overcome with firm dignity the senseless challenge of terrorism. I do not doubt that with equal determination, in the awareness of those supreme values, the Italian people will find an adequate solution to the other problems which it feels deeply, beginning with those of respect for life, the promotion of justice and the assurance of an equal opportunity of employment for everyone. I briefly mentioned my pastoral journeys along the peninsula. I am happy to have the opportunity to attest to my gratitude for the effective efforts of the Italian authorities, on all levels, and of the public services to enable the scheduled movements and the crowds of people which accompany them always to take place in a safe and tranquil climate.

3. Before making this official visit, Mr. President, you wanted to await, in order to emphasize its value, the conclusion of the Agreement on changes in the Lateran Concordat, whose framework has already significantly obtained the consensus of a parliamentary majority which extends beyond the formally governative political area. Because of the lofty motives which inspire it, I hope that the new agreement – which in a special way and in important sectors increases the values of the role of the Italian Episcopal Conference may in the years to come mark an increase in the good relations between religious institutions and civil ones, all destined to promote the good of the country through the advancement of man.

4. Mr. President, man, the human person, in his wonderful potential just as in his frailty (moral before physical), in reality is the great «way of the Church». The Church is aware that the message proclaimed by Christ's mandate is demanding in the ideals and the obligations which it entails; but it is equally aware that it serves the cause of man and makes the human person grow. And the person is also the way which a State that is democratic and open to the future cannot but take if it truly wants to serve man. In this conviction I know that I am in agreement with you, Mr. President, as also with those Italians who are responsible for public affairs. And I am certain that in your frequent contacts with the people – and above all with young people, who surround you with so much affectionate trust – you too, Mr. President, will have been able to feel, at the basis of so many and diverse interests, a common passion for man: for that freedom and justice, distinct but inseparable values, which are necessary for the full development of everyone's personality. Despite the difficulties, the delays and often the steps backward, this vast and growing commitment for the recognition of the eminent dignity of the human person as the aim of every public institution leads us to hope well for the country's future.

5. May this commitment always guide the action of Italy, both in the national field as well in the concert of peoples: primarily on behalf of the most needy: the poor and those who, in vast and less fortunate regions of the earth, are stricken by hunger or other calamities; to safeguard peace, which cannot exist without respect for man's rights and, in its turn, is itself a fundamental condition for the realization of every right; to foster whatever makes the Italian homeland just and great, worthy and deserving of love and sacrifice. With these wishes, Mr. President, I invoke God's blessing upon Italy and all

Italian.

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