



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
A S. E. L' ONOREVOLE BETTINO CRAXI,
PRESIDENTE DEL CONSIGLIO DEI MINISTRI ITALIANO****

Lunedì, 3 giugno 1985

1. I am very grateful to you, Mr. President of the Council of Ministers, for the courteous gesture of respect which you have wished to make with regard to the Roman Pontiff on the day on which, with the exchange of the instruments of ratification of the recent agreement between Italy and the Holy See, the norms of the new Concordat enter into force. I thank you especially for the noble words with which you have expressed the significance of the contractual event which today reaches its culmination, placing at its centre the safeguarding and promotion of the human person in its every dimension. I am happy to extend a deferent and cordial welcome to Your Excellency, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to all the distinguished personages who have accompanied you.

A new period opens today in the institutional relations between Church and State in Italy. The wish springs up spontaneously that they be fruitful for the civil and religious progress of this dear nation, whose history and culture – as the recent ecclesial Congress of Loreto emphasized – "are intimately entwined with the Church's journey beginning from Apostolic times".

An instrument of harmony and collaboration, the Concordat is situated now in a society characterized by free competition of ideas and by pluralistic articulation of the various social components. It can and must constitute an element of promotion and growth, fostering the profound unity of ideals and sentiments by which all Italians feel themselves to be brothers in the same homeland.

2. At Loreto I recalled that "precisely the form of democratic government that Italy has achieved... offers the space for and presupposes the presence of all believers". The ecclesial community is aware of playing an active role in Italian society, and of guaranteeing its original contribution

before the great problems which today afflict society and which require immediate and far-reaching solutions, such as promotion of life and the quality of life, safeguarding of the family, cultural progress, organization of work and creation of new positions of employment, particularly for youth. The ecclesial community knows that it can propose its views for overcoming the evils which seem to have become endemic, above all in the industrial and urban centres, such as discrimination against the weak, the aged, the handicapped, immigrants and the tremendous plague of the spread of drug abuse.

It is a contribution of values ideas and strengths that the Italian Church draws from the gospel message and from the significant and rich religious tradition which has written glowing pages in this nation's history. The mind turns spontaneously to the thriving season of the community civilization in which the Christian faith was the leaven in an original and creative experience of civil liberty; it moves to the Renaissance, when the splendid spring of arts burst into bloom, repeating in the language of beauty the truth and images of Revelation. Travelling down through the centuries, the mind reveals still admiringly, the drive of evangelization and uplift of the people springing from the Catholic Reformation. It pauses painfully before the tribulations of the Romantic and Resorgimento ages, these, too, permeated with ideal ferments, whose final roots are sunk into the soil of Christian tradition, as rightly observed Alexander Manzoni, the great writer the second centenary of whose death we commemorate this year. Finally, the mind is elated at the still vivid memory of believers' participation in the sufferings of war and the rebirth from the ruins of the appalling conflict, when not few priests and lay people sealed with their blood their witness to the evangelical values of brotherhood and freedom.

The Church of today feels committed by the example and mandate of her divine Founder, and also by the memory of her past, to continue in the commitment of service to man, in whose centrality she discerns the principle of convergence between believers and non-believers in the present era

3. In exercising this ministry (diaconia) for man, the Church intends to operate with full respect for the autonomy of the political order and for the sovereignty of the State. Equally, she is attentive to the safeguarding of everyone's freedom, a condition indispensable to the up-building of a world worthy of man, who only in freedom can fully seek the truth and adhere sincerely to it, finding in it reason and inspiration for mutual and united commitment to the common good.

Certainly, the Church's proper and original contribution to the good of civil society – through her members who are also citizens of the State – is properly of a moral nature. This contribution does not fail, by its inherent dynamic, to make itself felt in other sectors of human experience, stimulating in them consistent progress towards ever higher goals. For this reason the Church is convinced that "the promotion of moral values is a fundamental contribution to the true progress of society".

Eminent and primary is, in this regard, the moral inspiration of the individual persons: even a republic endowed with the most perfect laws would in fact be far from able to achieve its aims if it were not sustained by the ethical tension of its members. Equally, the industrious participation of all its parts and ecclesial movements in the life of the country, in an open dialogue with all other powers guarantees to Italian society an irreplaceable contribution of high moral and civil inspiration.

4. In this context, I would like to address a dutiful and cordial thought to the entire Italian Episcopal Conference, whose role of special responsibility the norms of the new Concordat appropriately recognize. It is in fact the bishops who are the first guarantors and promoters of that contribution of values which the Christian community ensures to the up building of society. The pastors' closeness to families, beginning from their foundation in the sacramental celebration of marriage whose civil effects are acknowledged, the pastoral care that they will take that the teaching of the Catholic religion in the state schools may be given in fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church and may adequately satisfy the aims of the school; the stimulus that they will be able to give to the ecclesial bodies that they may be ever more responsive to the needs of modern man; here are some of the principal occasions for fruitful contributions to the increase in the Christian values of society, pointed out by the very norms of the Concordat.

It seems right for me to add: the ecclesial community is well aware that it cannot be the sole promoter of values in civil society. It gives, but at the same time receives, in a kind of existential dialogue. Is not perhaps this the truth that emerges from the very history of Christian spirituality, in which are discerned saints such as Francis, Clare, Catherine of Siena, and Philip Neri, in whom the mark of the Italian "genius" was so clear as to confer on their witness the features of an unmistakable originality? But the remark is also true of many other aspects of ecclesial life, among which I limit myself to mention the commitment to charity and assistance, which is a direct response to a precise indication from Christ (cf. Lk 10:9; Mk 25:36). How can one fail to recognize the exquisitely Italian characters of the "Misericordia" and of other confraternities with charitable aims, and can one fail to stand in admiration before the first great hospital complexes, to which brilliant architects of the Renaissance gave also a nobility of aesthetical line, to which man of that period was especially sensitive. In the nation's history are recorded constant attestations to this fruitful symbiosis, whose great importance has been revealed for the advancement of individuals and for the progress of the whole society.

5. This visit of yours to the Vatican, Mr. President of the Council, is taking place while the Italian government is fulfilling its semestral turn of presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Community. From the Community's foundation, Italy has always been commendably committed to promoting its institutions, strengthening its unity and facilitating its opening-up – generously and far-sightedly – to other countries. Also the recent project for European union has been characterized by the effective contribution of Italian initiative and support. In the building up of

tomorrow's Europe, the Catholics of Italy (just as, on the other hand, the Catholics of the other European countries) will spontaneously be allied with those who wish to work in order that the political unity of the continent may be built upon the solid foundation of a communion of moral and cultural values, giving attention more to the common ideal roots than to the also necessary convergence of interests. It is on these bases, in fact, that the Europe of the year two thousand will once again be able to be a pole for the spread of culture and civilization and a impelling centre of solidarity for the development of less fortunate countries.

In this context of ideals, I renew my most sincere wish that Italy may respond fully to the vocation which for so many reasons – historical, cultural, geographical and, not least, religious – distinguishes it in the assembly of the peoples.

And from my heart I invoke the blessing of God on Italy, on its rulers, and on all its citizens.

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