



The Holy See

VISITA PASTORALE IN AUSTRIA

INCONTRO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II CON IL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA E CON IL CORPO DIPLOMATICO NEL «WIENER HOFBURG»*

Vienna - Giovedì, 23 giugno 1988

1. After the uplifting religious celebration in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, it is a particular joy for me now to have the opportunity in this festive setting to offer you, Mr. President, the members of the Federal Government and the rest of the Representatives of the Republic of Austria my sincere greetings. I thank you from my heart for the worthy reception and the great interest which you have shown in my second trip to your country from the moment it was announced. The extensive arrangements which you have also undertaken on the part of the State for the proper realization of this pastoral visit will contribute much to the fact that the meetings with the people at the various locations will become a memorable experience.

This helpful cooperation and our meeting today once again underline the good relationship which 'has long existed between the Holy See and Austria. On the basis of the right of religious and moral freedom which is recognized in your Constitution and the reciprocal agreement reached in the Concordat, the life of the Catholic Church in Austria has had a blessed development. Catholic Christians have, in the happy as well as the sorrowful hours of their country, had many noteworthy achievements. Especially in 1988, I wish to remember the suffering which Austria, along with other nations, had to endure under cruel and tyrannical rule in the recent past. Many Catholics, priests, religious and lay people are among those who were persecuted for religious, racial or political reasons at that time.

2. The present democratic constitution of your country and the freedoms which it guarantees are a precious inheritance, which must be carefully protected and developed. Despite the prevailing ideological pluralism of today, the life of Austria is in many ways still 'basically stamped with Christian values. Freedom, rightly understood, does not mean detachment and the right to do whatever one wants, but rather is, as one theologian (John of Salisbury) once correctly said, the

right to do good.

Through the theme of my pastoral visit, I would like to encourage the people of this country anew towards the good, which is «Yes to Life» in all its dimensions. The Church, through her faith, says a clear and unqualified «yes» to this good, and through this she feels herself in solidarity with the society in whose midst she works. However, if certain dimensions of life should be in danger of becoming curtailed or distorted, she likewise feels obliged to fulfill the prophetic service of speaking in opposition, whether it is convenient or not.

Our «yes» to life must include the «yes» to freedom and the dignity of the person, the «yes to tolerance and the «yes» to justice and peace. A «yes» to life understood in this way forbids the persecution or defamation of our fellow human beings who hold other views. It requires the recognition of the right to life of every person, and the insight that the freedom of one ends where the freedom of the other begins. Justice and the common good are those fundamental goals towards which the activities of the people in their national and international life should be oriented. In the Pastoral Constitution «Gaudium et Spes», the Second Vatican Council said: «The social order and its development must constantly orient itself to the good of persons, because the order of things must become subservient to the order of persons, and not the reverse» (N. 26). Such an ordering which does justice to the person begins with the protection of unborn life, requires respect for marriage and the family, the concern for jobs, and trust-building dialogue and partnership in as many areas of community life as possible. If respect for the dignity and fundamental rights of persons stands at the centre of our actions, then it will also be possible to transcend self interests and Party and State boundaries to arrive at fair and just solutions to disagreements, or in many cases, even to avoid them from the beginning.

3. Austria's concern for national as well as international peace as the fruit of justice, its efforts for the protection of human rights, its help for many refugees and its solidarity with the great problems of the people in the Third World: all of these have earned international respect for your country. The Catholic Church in Austria has, in conjunction with the universal Church, made itself an energetic advocate of these concerns, and is prepared to continue in this collaborative partnership. Although like other countries Austria is confronted by growing economic difficulties, I am certain that it will also never stop its helpful attitude toward its needy fellow human beings throughout the world in the future. May your country continue to have an open door for those people who have had to leave their homelands under tragic circumstances.

Austria knows its chance and its duty to be a bridge in the heart of Europe, and to this end is making exemplary efforts in the political and cultural areas. One may never allow oneself to be reconciled to the fact that countries or peoples, especially when they are neighbours, should meet each other as if they were strangers, or had no relationship. Our entire European continent requires a creative process of renewal for a united Europe. The Church can make an important contribution to this work of mediation and understanding. From its beginnings, the Christian faith

has been a formative power which has transcended boundaries in all the countries of Europe. As I emphasized in my October 1982 address to the participants of the Fifth Symposium of the Council of the European Bishops Conference in Rome, the Church and Europe are «two realities intimately bound by their being and their destinies. Together they have travelled along a centuries old path and remain marked by the same history. Europe was baptized by Christianity; and the European nations, in their diversity, have given substance to Christian existence. In their encounter they have enriched one another with values which have become not only the soul of European civilization but also a patrimony for all of mankind». Through a collaborative effort, this Christian identity and inner unity of Europe must be rediscovered and made fruitful for the future of this continent and the world. The Church is anxious to make her special contribution to this task through increased efforts for a new type of evangelization of the people of Europe.

4. Ladies and gentlemen, the service of humanity, that is the duty of those who govern the State. This is even expressed in the name given to the office of Minister itself. The service of humanity is also the duty and purpose of the Church, and all true Christians who belong to her. The more surely the Church serves God, the more surely she serves humanity as well. When those who carry the highest responsibility of the State and the pastors of the Church work together for the good of humanity, while maintaining the individuality of the State and the Church, then through this they both fulfil an important dimension of their own duty. The great questions and tasks which already confront the whole of society today, and which may perhaps become even more urgent tomorrow, render such an open collaboration based on mutual respect particularly desirable. In the hope that the cooperative partnership of the State and the Church which already exists here in Austria will continue to develop fruitfully for the good of humanity, you have, Mr. President and Mr. Chancellor, and all of you who, as members of the Austrian Federal Government or in some other capacity, carry great responsibility in the State or society, my personal best wishes. They are, at the same time, a prayer to the triune God: May he continue to protect and to bless this country and its people.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* n.35 p.8, 9.

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