



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
DURANTE LA VISITA UFFICIALE DEL PRESIDENTE
DEL CONSIGLIO DEI MINISTRI D'ITALIA****

Sabato, 19 novembre 1988

Mr. President of the Council,

I am happy to meet you and I express to you the most cordial welcome, which I wish to extend to all the distinguished persons who accompany you.

Your visit offers me the gratifying opportunity to address a respectful greeting to the President of the Republic and to the eminent members of the Government you preside over. At the same time I embrace the whole Italian Nation whose bond and attachment to the Successor of Peter is witnessed to daily here in Rome as well as in my pastoral visits in the different dioceses of the country.

Today Italian society is passing through a period marked by a dynamic civil, cultural and economic growth. New and promising forces of participation, dialogue and co-responsibility are emerging in the structure of the social fabric. Included in these are the growth of a more sensitive ethical conscience in youth, the reflowering of the religious sense and a growing impulse of solidarity, which is determined also by the experience of volunteer service. All this cannot but meet with appreciation and encouragement on the part of the Church.

On the other hand, old and new problems still remain without adequate solution. Many of them concern the sphere of the Church's pastoral mission. I am aware of the sensitivity, attention and commitment which the Government presided over by yourself devotes to the promotion of the common good and to overcoming situations of tension and hardship. On the other hand, I wish to recall the care with which the Catholic Church in Italy makes its generous contribution thereto, not infrequently in striking unison of purpose and action with citizens of other convictions and with

organizations of different inspiration.

A first spontaneous remark concerns the lessening of the moral sense in a large section of the population and the concomitant phenomena of the deterioration of morals which seem to an ever less degree to arouse those reactions which one might legitimately expect from a country of Christian tradition such as Italy.

In the sphere of what is usually called the "moral question", it is a quite important duty to affirm unhesitatingly the dignity of the person and the sacredness of human life. Faithful to the mandate received from her Divine Founder, the Church proclaims and defends the principle of the inviolability of life which is a gift of God. The refusal of this gift, and likewise certain manipulations or experimentation on human life on the part of a technology bereft of ethical principles cannot but be firmly rejected as contrary to divine law and to human dignity itself. The defence of life extends to the entire span of man's earthly life, and is expressed in every initiative suited to protecting it and to promoting the quality of life in the care of the weak, the sick and the elderly.

Matters of no small importance from the moral point of view are some situations of injustice and suffering, especially the cases of the so-called "new poverty", the insufficiency of welfare organizations, the disturbing spread of drug addiction and of the crime connected with it the often precarious conditions of immigrants from other nations, especially from the developing countries. These are questions of great importance and complexity, to which it is not easy to find satisfactory and definitive solutions. However, it is a sign of hope to note that the work of public institutions is flanked by initiatives of associations--many of them Catholic--which deserve recognition.

After all, every member of society must assume due responsibility for these problems. An altogether special role pertains however to the family, whose value the Italian people have always held in high esteem and which has been an inexhaustible reservoir of religious and moral resources. Today the family is subjected to pressures of disintegration which run the risk of compromising--especially in the minds of the young--its unity, indissolubility, and its very mission of educating the children. The support, fostering and defence of the family, even by means of adequate decisions of social policy, is a guarantee of the very future of the Nation.

Mr. Prime Minister,

The recent Concordat Accord, which has inaugurated a new place in the institutional relations between Church and State, opens with the affirmation of the reciprocal commitment to collaborate for human advancement and for the well being of the country.

Today's meeting offers me the occasion to assure you of the Church's firm resolve to continue, with sincerity and disinterestedness in this fruitful collaboration. She is indeed aware of carrying out an active role in the life of society and of making her own specific contribution of values, ideas

and forces which she draws from the Gospel message and from a religious tradition which has marked the luminous pages of the nation history.

Important advances have already been made, and I have reason to believe that notwithstanding certain inevitable difficulties, both parties can be rightly satisfied.

You will permit me, in this regard, to recall with gratitude the work carried out by the Italian Episcopal Conference to which the Accord attributes special and direct responsibilities. The Italian bishops, both in the practical implementation of the Concordat norms, and, more generally, in invigorating and guiding their communities in renewed commitment for the common good, have given eloquent proof of great dedication and a deep sense of responsibility, not only pastoral but also civic, which no one can legitimately refuse to acknowledge.

Moreover, they have the consolation of finding an ever more willing response on the part of their faithful. I should like to mention in particular the teaching of religion in the schools, envisaged by the Accord and regulated by the subsequent Agreement. The youths and their families have freely made their choice to avail themselves of it by such a large majority that it would be rather difficult to explain the phenomenon by incidental reasons.

The Church views with sincere respect those of a different faith or ideology, but she must, in fulfilment of her duty, even more than vindicating her right in the matter, protect with serene firmness the legitimate desire of Catholic parents and youths who intend to complete their formation with the Christian values, which pertain to the spiritual and cultural patrimony of the Italian Nation.

On other points of common interest contacts between Church and State are at present in progress as explicitly envisaged by the text of the Agreement. In other sectors not considered by the Agreement a positive dialogue continues in the context of a fruitful collaboration. The Church asks nothing other than real freedom, and she pursues a climate of sincere concord for a common service which meets in the best possible way the expectations not only of her own faithful, but of all the citizens.

Mr. Prime Minister,

The Holy See follows with constant attention and lively interest the work carried out by Italy in the various international forums on behalf of peace, of respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms – among which freedom of conscience and religion – and for the construction of an international order with greater respect for the demands of justice and solidarity.

Among the problems that rightly claim the attention of Italy, also as a Mediterranean Power, there stands out that of the Middle East, where a sad and already endemic situation of conflict causes bereavement and divisions, placing an intolerable mortgage on the future of entire peoples and

endangering the security and peace of the world. The contribution of the Italian Government matches the expectations and requirements of so many peoples who look with confidence also at Italy's patient work on behalf of peace.

Nor could I forget the active support that Italy has given, right from the beginning, to the process of European unification. Important deadlines of Community integration are announced for the near future. But beyond technical terms and practical details, I deem it my duty to express the Holy See's cordial support for the construction of a united Europe. To attain that end, the Catholics of Italy, as of the other countries of the continent, have carried out a decisive role, manifesting the ancient sharing of Christian roots and the rich patrimony of common moral and cultural values. It is on these foundations that a united Europe will be able to be a driving force of solidarity and peace in the family of nations.

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Finally, I wish to recall the praiseworthy commitment which – especially in recent years – places Italy among the convinced protagonists of cooperation with the developing countries. It would be superfluous to stress how important this is to the Catholic Church ever particularly sensitive to the needs of the less fortunate people. After all, the Government has availed itself on numerous occasions of the collaboration of missionaries and of international volunteer ecclesial organizations. The action directed at promoting the progress of peoples in a spirit of solidarity, does honour to Italy and to those who guide its destinies.

Mr. Prime Minister,

The Bishop of Rome cannot but regard Italy as particularly his, because of the unique ties which Providence has established between it and this Apostolic See. It is therefore with very special affection that I express for this Nation a sincere wish for peace, well-being and progress. With all my heart I have this wish in my prayer, and I invoke upon the Head of State, on yourself and on all those who have responsibility in social life, as on all Italians, the abundance of divine blessings.

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