



The Holy See

***INCONTRO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
CON IL NUOVO PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA,
OSCAR LUIGI SCALFARO****

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Mr. President,

1. I desire to express to you in person my profound gratitude for the visit with which you honour me today and to convey to you my cordial welcome to the home of the Successor of Peter.

Today's event, such a solemn one, brings to mind another less formal but hardly less significant meeting of ours, when, as a very courteous and much appreciated gesture you came to visit me during my stay in the Gemelli Hospital, testifying to the affectionate sympathy of the entire Italian nation for me during my illness.

Through you today I would like first of all to convey to the Italian citizens my feelings of gratitude for the spiritual closeness expressed to me at that time and to address a special greeting to each one of them.

I am as happy now as I was last July to receive you as the representative of the Italian people, whose lawful representatives elected you a few months ago, with a large consensus, to the highest office of the State. In expressing to you once again my warmest best wishes for the successful accomplishment of the mission entrusted to you in the service of the democratic institutions, allow me also to tell you how personally pleased I was to see a man of proven experience and honesty called to the highest office of the State, a man wisely attentive to those juridical and moral values which constitute the fabric that holds the nation together.

2. The meeting between the Head of State of the Italian Republic and the Pastor of the universal

Church cannot but recall to our common consideration the historical and institutional context underlying our mutual relationship: the Lateran Pacts which, having been updated in 1984 with the revision of the Concordat, confirm the total independence and autonomy of the political and ecclesial communities in their respective fields, reminding them of the common service due, although by different titles, to the individual and social vocation of the same people, and committing both to a healthy cooperation with each other, according to the ways called for by concrete circumstances.

History, even recent history, shows how greatly the Apostolic See and the Church have been participants in the civil and human affairs, sometimes painful and tragic, of the Italian nation, contributing to the growth of its cultural, social and spiritual heritage. It is my sincere wish that Italian Catholics, today as in the past, be ready to offer their specific contribution to building the City of Man, in an attitude of «obedience» to God and of «fidelity» to history, following the example of so many noble figures who have preceded them as loyal citizens and upright believers.

3. You know quite well, Mr President, what diligent work the Holy See performs on behalf of peace and how the Successor of Peter – faithful to the mandate received from Christ the Lord, the «Prince of Peace» (Is 9:5) – continues, sometimes with a grave, admonishing voice, to insist on a real victory over antagonisms, both old and new, of conflicts and grievous hurts. The Church's mission of evangelization, in fact, is also a tireless proclamation of the dignity of the human person and of the rights of peoples. And this is a mission which is confirmed in all its urgency, if one looks at the new configuration of Europe, marked, in quite a number of regions, by continuing instability, not to mention tragic conflicts as well.

It is true that with the fall of ideologies and bloc rivalries the ancient and noble countries of Eastern Europe have finally seen their journey toward freedom achieved (cf. Speech to the Diplomatic Corps, January 1990). They have thus become active agents of their own history, rediscovering their traditions and their cultural and spiritual resources after decades of oppression and isolation. But such promising opportunities for development and integral growth could prove to be ephemeral and illusory, without the fraternal support of the nations of Western Europe. All must work together to plan a courageous joint project of collaboration and integration which, by overcoming situations of political fragility and economic weakness, would favour the emergence of the genuine values of the homo europaeus.

I am certain that thanks to its rich cultural and religious heritage, Italy will not fail to make its own important contribution to building a common house for all the peoples of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals. This will have beneficial effects even at the world level both on peaceful coexistence and on respect for the rights of individuals and peoples.

4. The Church does not feel extraneous to, but rather in profound solidarity with the life of every people. For this reason she is closely involved in the Italian people's current situation, one

characterized by seeds of hope, but marked also by elements of unrest and anxiety. The problem is one that affects the entire framework of the country. In it the Church invites us to see not only the shadows but also some positive signs which give promise of new balance, new forms of living together, within the context of a world situation which is profoundly changed after the collapse of «walls» and ideologies.

It is therefore of the utmost importance to strive ceaselessly for the ethical and spiritual values of the individual and of society, seeking solutions based on the fundamental principle of solidarity, with sincere intention and united effort. In this regard the ecclesial community can contribute the rich heritage of its own social doctrine, as a modern and dynamic point of reference and inspiration.

Following the proper criteria of respect for their respective natures, the recent revisions of the Concordat, to which I referred above, are aimed at promoting, a fruitful, dynamic interchange between the democratic development of the country and the life giving presence of the Church, so as to keep alive in the social and cultural fabric the seeds of those values on which the very Constitution and the civil society of the Italian people ultimately rest. They are the immutable and non negotiable values of the dignity of the human person, of the right to life from conception until its natural end, of the right to religious freedom and to freedom of conscience. And again: they are the values of honesty and hard work, of justice and solidarity, of pluralism and subsidiarity, of legitimate local autonomy fostered within the framework of national unity and of an openness to European and international cooperation.

Not least, the Church acknowledges, promotes and sustains the value of the family institution, the true and primary vital cell of the entire society. The spirit in which she proclaims the «Gospel of the family» and strives to see it put into practice, has a happy resonance in the text of the Italian Constitution, which acknowledges the rights of the nuclear family as a society founded on marriage.

5. In the context of these values, fully shared since the democratic constitutional foundation of Italy, the Holy See reaffirms the willingness of Catholics to participate in every form of mutual and fruitful collaboration, always with a view to integral human development and the true welfare of the country.

It is for this reason desirable that a prompt and constructive conclusion be reached to the implementation phase of the Accords of 18 February 1984 (revising the Concordat), particularly in regard to the section on ecclesiastical cultural goods: these constitute not only an incalculable heritage for the entire human race, but also a living testimony to the fruitful encounter between the Italian genius and the principles of the Christian faith. As such, they visibly represent the roots and the meaning of that unifying identity of the Italian nation which precedes and accompanies the forms it takes as a state, harmoniously incorporating the richness and variety of its regional and

local structures.

6. Mr President, making my own the words of the Italian Episcopal Conference, I want to address, through your person, all the Italian people, inviting them to look with confidence toward the future, to believe that ours is not a time for surrender but for courage, generosity and tenacity. Italy possesses human energies and material resources which are quite sufficient to overcome the difficulties of the present moment, in a logic of justice and solidarity which will enable an ancient, but still vital, heritage of cultural, social and spiritual harmony to discover and develop new potential, adequate to the demands of the present time (cf. Minutes of the 36th General Meeting of the Italian Episcopal Conference, Collevalenza, 26-29 October 1992).

How can we fail to think in this regard of the innumerable resources of the Italian people? How can we fail to recall, among other things, the generous and creative interventions of so many voluntary associations and of so many young people, who spend themselves freely and with self denial in order to respond in new ways to emerging problems, especially in the area of modern forms of alienation?

I address above all those young people to whom you, Mr. President, seek to transmit those ideals of justice and of peace which have shaped the history of the Italian people, urging them to claim as their own those eternal values which are so indispensable to the birth of free societies marked by solidarity.

Last of all, I express my wish that with your enlightened guidance, Italy may continue in unity and harmony on the path blazed by the faith and civic involvement of its ancestors; may it find in its millennia of history the motivation for a renewed impetus to protect and promote the human, moral and spiritual values which have gained it the world's honour and respect; may it progress effectively in seeking the just well being and authentic prosperity of each of its inhabitants. These, Mr. President, are the wishes which I am pleased to make for you and the entire people of Italy. I invoke God's blessing upon you and your family, as well as upon the authorities present and the beloved Italian nation.

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