



The Holy See

***DISCORSO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II
AL NUOVO AMBASCIATORE
D'ITALIA PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE****

Giovedì, 10 marzo 1994

Mr. Ambassador,

In accepting the Letters of Credence with which you are inaugurating your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Italian Republic to the Holy See, I address my cordial wishes to the Head of State, Mr. Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, as well as to the entire people of Italy, whose sentiments of loyalty and sincere devotion you have so eloquently interpreted.

Constant attention to and pre-eminent pastoral concern for the universal Church and the religious needs of peoples do not prevent me from devoting equal consideration to the destiny and to the human and spiritual problems of Italy, «which from the beginning of my Pontificate has shown me such great goodwill, ... that I feel able to speak of Italy as my second homeland» (Letter to the Italian Episcopate, 6 January 1994; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 19 January 1994, p. 5)

For a considerable number of years now, after bitter tensions and painful interruptions, relations between the Holy See and Italy have found a fortunate and vital balance in the Lateran Pacts, confirmed by the Revision Agreement in 1984, whose 10th anniversary occurs this year. The time that has passed since this event makes it possible to declare that the greatest significance of the Agreement is precisely the «reciprocal collaboration for the promotion of man and the good of the country» to which in art. 1 the State and Church are solemnly and sincerely bound.

As is known, some important aspects of the implementation phase of the Agreement have yet to be completed, such as safeguarding the great heritage of the Church's cultural property in Italy. Its preservation and appreciation are intended for the good of the individual as a whole, as well as for the civil and cultural development of society. No less can one observe how this «healthy

co-operation» (Gaudium et spes, n. 76) has been positively employed in various sectors precisely by virtue of the common, though distinct, purpose of the Church and the political community in serving mankind.

Aware that all legal regulations, even those of conventional origin, are not made to halt the ceaseless development of human society but to guide it and accompany it in the march of history towards objectives and goals that are identified from time to time, it is easy to imagine that this dedication to the human cause can and must be broadened to include other areas, even if these are not directly addressed by the above-mentioned Agreements.

I would like to refer to the just and legitimate expectations – recalled over the past few days – entertained by the Italian ecclesial community with respect to the future of Catholic schools, which serve all civil society, especially its weakest and most alienated members. The search for satisfactory and balanced solutions in this regard would, on the one hand, recognize the value of a necessary dimension of the Church's evangelizing mission, and on the other, would permit the implementation of a freer and fuller contribution by Christian families to the construction and defence of the nation's unique cultural, moral and social heritage. It must be constantly kept in mind that «man's horizons are not bounded only by the temporal order; living on the level of human history he preserves the integrity of his eternal destiny» (Gaudium et spes, n. 76).

Mr Ambassador, in your address you remembered the Holy See's enduring effort to encourage peace, and with courteous and appreciative words you stressed how the Successor of Peter continues to raise his voice in favour of overcoming new and old antagonisms, painful and inhuman wounds, exasperated nationalisms and bloody conflicts like those destroying Bosnia, convinced that the Church's evangelizing mission is also a commitment to the proclamation and promotion of human dignity and the rights of peoples.

I thank you for your words: the urgency of this mission is actually confirmed if one looks at the «altered geopolitical map of Europe... in constant evolution» that predicts «great challenges and new scenarios for the years ahead...» (Letter to the Italian Episcopate, n. 2). Indeed, if the recent disturbances in Central and Eastern Europe have shown the absurdity of the claims of atheistic and totalitarian regimes to uproot man's faith and his freedom and have enabled entire nations to reappropriate their own history, they have also caused serious tensions and divisions to emerge. To be healed, the help of the whole European continent is needed.

In this context, I renew my conviction that Italy as a nation has «a great deal to offer Europe as a whole» (ibid., n. 4) in fostering unity and solidarity throughout the continent, a unity made more fruitful by the light and power of the Gospel.

A contribution to be measured, of course, in practical and concrete initiatives to promote co-operation and integration between the East and the West of Europe; but, even before that, it is

destined to be put at the service of all, in defence of the «religious and cultural heritage linked to Rome by the Apostles Peter and Paul»; a heritage, which, as is known, some recent orientations of European institutions risk seriously jeopardizing, reducing it to a purely economic and secular dimension (cf. *ibid.*, n. 4).

I am referring to some instances which – as I recalled in my recent «Letter to Families» – appear more directly to threaten the basic rights of the family «*seminarium rei publicae*», as it was already considered in ancient Rome, itself the «natural society based on marriage» (art. 29 of the Italian Constitution).

I cannot but hope that remembering its incomparable moral and civil heritage and aware of the extent to which the family can foster serene social coexistence, the Italian nation may always prove to be the jealous custodian of the dignity and rights of this basic institution of natural law. In the present, somewhat unfavourable social and cultural context the family urgently needs to be supported by an organic policy that is able to satisfy its various economic, juridical and social needs, and is committed to safeguarding the sacredness of life from conception to its natural decline.

Mr. Ambassador, in my recent message to the Italian Episcopate, prompted only by the love that I feel for the Italian nation, I was able to reflect on the delicate moment of history that the whole country is experiencing, and I expressed my hope that Italy will be able to overcome it successfully, strengthening its own spiritual and cultural identity in harmony and solidarity. In renewing these wishes, I am now pleased to assure you of the commitment with which both the Italian Bishops and all the members of the ecclesial community share in the human and civil events of the beloved Italian nation. In particular, then, Catholic citizens will not fail to continue to make their constructive contribution in the forefront of generous dedication to serving the common good.

Mr. Ambassador, the matters I have just now sketched allow a glimpse of the paths on which further, worthwhile collaboration between the Holy See and Italy will be able to proceed on behalf of peace among the peoples and of the strenuous defence of the basic rights of the human person. I likewise trust that with God's help, this harmony of objectives may be reinforced by successful results, also through the activities that you are preparing to undertake.

As I assure you of my high esteem, I offer my most fervent wishes for the success of your mission and impart my Apostolic Blessing to you with all my heart, Mr. Ambassador, gladly extending it to your co-workers, to their respective families and to all the beloved Italian people.

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