



The Holy See

VISIT OF POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC
H.E. MR CARLO AZEGLIO CIAMPI

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

*Quirinal Palace
Friday, 24 June 2005*

Mr President,

I have the joy today of reciprocating the most cordial visit that you were pleased to pay me as Head of the Italian State last 3 May on the occasion of the new pastoral service to which the Lord has called me. First of all, therefore, I would like to thank you and through you, to thank the Italian People for the warm welcome they have accorded me from the very first day of my pastoral service as Bishop of Rome and Pastor of the universal Church.

For my part, I assure the citizens of Rome and then the whole Italian Nation of my commitment to do my utmost for the religious and civil good of those whom the Lord has entrusted to my pastoral care.

The proclamation of the Gospel which, in communion with the Italian Bishops, I am called to make to Rome and to Italy, is not only at the service of the Italian people's growth in faith and in the Christian life but also of its progress on the paths of concord and peace. Christ is the Saviour of the whole person, spirit and body, his spiritual and eternal destiny and his temporal and earthly life. Thus, when his message is heard, the civil community also becomes more responsible and attentive to the needs of the common good and shows greater solidarity with the poor, the abandoned and the marginalized.

Reviewing Italian history, one is struck by the innumerable works of charity that the Church, with

great sacrifices, set up for the relief of all kinds of suffering. Today the Church intends to journey on along this same path, without any ambition for power and without requesting social or financial privileges. The example of Jesus Christ, who "went about doing good works and healing all" (Acts 10: 38), remains the Church's supreme norm of conduct among the peoples.

Relations between the Church and the Italian State are founded on the principle spelled out by the Second Vatican Council, which says: "The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. Nevertheless, both are devoted to the personal vocation of man, though under different titles" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76).

This principle was already present in the Lateran Pacts and was subsequently confirmed in the Agreements that modified the Concordat. Therefore, a healthy secularism of the State, by virtue of which temporal realities are governed according to their own norms but which does not exclude those ethical references that are ultimately founded in religion, is legitimate. The autonomy of the temporal sphere does not exclude close harmony with the superior and complex requirements that derive from an integral vision of man and his eternal destiny.

I am eager to assure you, Mr President, and all the Italian People, that the Church desires to maintain and to foster a cordial spirit of collaboration and understanding at the service of the spiritual and moral growth of the Country; it would be seriously harmful, not only for her but also for Italy, to attempt to weaken or to break these very special ties that bind her to the Country. The Italian culture is deeply imbued with Christian values, as can be seen in the splendid masterpieces that the Nation has produced in all fields of thought and art.

My hope is that the Italian People will not only not deny the Christian heritage that is part of their history but will guard it jealously and make it produce new fruits worthy of the past. I am confident that Italy, under the wise and exemplary guidance of those who are called to govern it, will continue to carry out in the world its civilizing mission in which it has so distinguished itself down the centuries. By virtue of its history and its culture, Italy can make a very worthwhile contribution, particularly to Europe, helping it to rediscover the Christian roots that enabled it to achieve greatness in the past and can still serve to deepen the profound unity of the Continent.

Mr President, as you can easily understand, I have many concerns at the beginning of my pastoral service on the Chair of Peter. I would like to point out some of them which, because of their universally human character, cannot but also concern those who are responsible for government. I am alluding to the problem of the protection of the family founded on marriage, as it is recognized also in the Italian Constitution (n. 29), the problem of the defence of human life from conception to its natural end and lastly, the problem of education and consequently of school, an indispensable training ground for the formation of the new generations.

The Church, accustomed as she is to scrutinizing God's will engraved in the very nature of the

human creature, sees in the family a most important value that must be defended from any attack that aims to undermine its solidity and call its very existence into question.

The Church recognizes human life as a primary good, the premise for all other goods. She therefore asks that it be respected both at its initial and its final stages and stresses the duty to provide adequate palliative treatment that makes death more human.

As for schools, her role is connected with the family as a natural expansion of its task of formation. In this regard, save the competence of the State to dictate the general norms of instruction, I cannot but express the hope that the right of parents to choose education freely will be respected, and that in so doing they will not have to bear the additional burden of further expenses. I trust that Italian legislators, in their wisdom, will be able to find "human" solutions to the problems mentioned here, in other words, solutions that respect the inviolable values implicit in them.

Lastly, expressing my hope that the Nation will continue to advance on the path of spiritual and material well being, I join you, Mr President, in urging all the citizens and all the members of society always to live and work in a spirit of genuine harmony, in a context of open dialogue and mutual trust, in the commitment to serve and promote the common good and the dignity of every person. I would like to conclude, Mr President, by recalling the esteem and affection that the Italian People feels for you, as well as its full confidence in fulfilling the duties inherent in your exalted office.

I have the joy of joining in this affectionate esteem and trust, as I entrust you and your Consort, Mrs Franca Ciampi, the leaders of the life of the Nation and the entire Italian People to the protection of the Virgin Mary, so intensely venerated in the countless shrines dedicated to her. With these sentiments, I invoke upon you all the Blessing of God, a pledge of every desired good.

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