



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR
TO THE HOLY SEE***

13 september 1999

Mr Ambassador,

I am particularly pleased to welcome you and to extend my fervent best wishes to you for the high office of Ambassador of Italy, a role that you officially assume today. In thanking you for the noble words you addressed to me, I wish to send a respectful and cordial greeting to H.E. Prof. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, President of the Republic, to whom I again extend my best wishes just a few months after his election to the highest office of the Italian Republic.

The apostolic mission of the Roman Pontiff knows no territorial limits, and for all peoples he is an equally attentive and caring father. However, his relationship to Rome and to Italy is a very special one: it is to this city that Peter came; it is here that he shed his blood; from Rome the Successors of Peter promoted the spread of the Good News throughout the world. Over a span of two millenniums this unique mission has never been wanting, even when, for a short period external circumstances compelled the Popes to leave the city that was, and remains, their natural seat.

This historical fact, so significant in itself, is nothing merely external or physical. Catholicism has shaped this country with endless signs of faith and charity. If it is true that Italy holds a glorious record for works of art, it is also true that a large number of them have a strong religious character and often a precise religious purpose. We should also remember, on the other hand, that Italy has given much to the Church: saints of exceptional stature, distinguished figures in every rank of the People of God, with unique contributions of genius and style to the Roman Curia, which was thus able to offer effective mediation in the tensions and conflicts which have long undermined the unity of Europe and menaced the peace of the world.

The 1900s happily overcame the misunderstandings and crises that had accompanied the establishment of Italy as a free national State. In this regard Pope Paul VI judged as somewhat providential the passing of the temporal domain, which nevertheless had an undeniable function in the past. Once the wounds that had distressed the fathers had been soothed, the new century made it possible to reach a balanced solution, which was also confirmed in the difficult events of recent decades. Already at the end of the First World War it was clear to Italy and to the Holy See that the 19th-century disagreement was now resolvable, but relations were only finalized with the Lateran Pacts. These are the essential principles of coexistence.

With the Treaty they have, moreover, confirmed the establishment of "Vatican City State", endowed with that minimum territorial basis necessary for guaranteeing the Pope and the Holy See absolute sovereignty and independence. The Concordat, beyond the letter of the law, has assumed great and exemplary value as a guarantee for that free practice of religious life which is the first among human rights, since it is essential for a mature and modern citizenry that spiritual inspiration be able to express itself with all its potential.

You, Mr Ambassador, opportunely recalled the mutual collaboration of the State and the Catholic Church "for the advancement of the human person and the good of the country" (cf. Art. 1, *Agreement on Revision of the Lateran Concordat of 1984*). This collaboration deserves to be deepened and continued in order to satisfy some fundamental aspirations that are particularly felt by the Church and by Catholics in Italy. The defence of human dignity from conception does indeed pertain to the natural law, but it expects from the State's positive legislation that full recognition based on an awareness that there is an undisputed value in motherhood for the individual and for society as a whole. The family, the basic cell of society and its natural foundation, also calls for its more effective recognition as the place of love for man and woman and the home for the hope of new lives. It is in the education of the younger generation that the religious experience of the Italian nation can boast a creative originality of scholastic institutions, to a great extent aimed at the less well-off, which deserves respect and support through effective legal and financial parity between State and non-State schools, which will courageously overcome misunderstandings and sectarianism, so foreign to the basic values of the European cultural tradition.

In the name of my special concern for the young generation, I feel compelled to ask all the members of Italian society to make a joint effort to overcome these obstacles and delays in order to provide the new generation with that work which frees the personality and enriches civil society. By drawing on these basic resources, Italy can manifest its vocation in the European context. If the unity of the old continent is not just an organizational or economic fact, Christian Italy can make a fundamental contribution to the building of a Europe of the spirit, in which even the very important external facts of the common home can be welcomed and harmonized. In fact, it is Christian inspiration that can transform a political and economic aggregate into a real common home for all Europeans, by helping to form an exemplary family of nations, from which other regions of the

world can draw fruitful inspiration.

If Europe is the first natural context where this fertile Italian presence can be exercised, we should not underestimate the incomparable network of relations that its special location in the Mediterranean offers Italy, making it the necessary passage for the entire continent's contacts with other shores of the same sea. What is expected of the Italian nation is not only a cultural and economic contribution, but also peacemaking and harmonious development in all the initiatives that far-sighted planning can elaborate. Italy can indeed be present as a peacemaker, earning an incomparable and well-deserved reputation among nations.

Joint builder of a Europe of the spirit, peacemaker in the Mediterranean, guardian of the ancient constitutive Christian soul of its history: this is the Italy of my hopes! To this end I wish that believers and all people of good will may always bear in mind the goal of transcendence. They have always and everywhere the duty not to marginalize the reference-point of the Spirit, the same reference-point which inspired the most vigilant consciences, which bore incomparable fruits in all fields and which really made this country great and unique.

Mr Ambassador, as you recalled, we are now on the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. It is comforting to see how the preparation for this important event, understood as an interior renewal and recovery of the values of the spirit, sees the effective participation of institutions and special initiatives in preparing an overall context to aid this experience of the soul.

In expressing my appreciation for all that the Italian authorities are doing in this regard, I would like to offer my wish that positive cooperation between the Italian Government and the Holy See will effectively continue in order to prepare a welcoming "home" for all the men and women of good will who will pass through Italy and come to Rome.

And with these wishes and hopes I confirm my affectionate concern for the human and civil affairs of the Italian people and I am pleased to renew, Mr Ambassador, my most heartfelt wishes for the success of your mission, as I cordially impart my Blessing to you, to your family and to your staff.

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