



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE 50th GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (CEI)**

Dear Italian Bishops,

1. *"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all"* (II Cor 13,13).

To each one of you, meeting at the Shrine of Merciful Love in Collevaleza, for your 50th General Assembly, I extend my cordial greeting, along with my best wishes for intense and fruitful days of prayer and work together. In particular, I greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, President, the three Vice-Presidents and the General Secretary, and all those who are generously dedicated to serving your Conference.

As always, I am very close to you in your daily concern as Pastors for the good of the particular Churches entrusted to your care and of the entire beloved Italian nation.

2. Your Assembly will mainly focus on what has become recently a growing challenge to the crucial question that was already central for the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 12) "What is the human person?". An ancient challenge but ever new, since what has never really faded is the tendency of denying or forgetting the uniqueness of our being and vocation as creatures made in God's image, and today it draws new vigour from the claim that one can adequately explain the human being by using only the methods of the empirical sciences. This is happening when it is more necessary than before to have a clear, sound conviction of the inviolable dignity of the human person, to confront the risks of radical manipulation that can take place, were the resources of technology to be applied to man, prescinding from the basic anthropological and ethical parameters and criteria inscribed in his nature.

This consciousness of the dignity that is ours by nature is also the only principle on which a truly

human society and civilization can be built, in a period when economic interests and the information and programmes presented by TV are rushed around the globe, threatening the cultural and moral values which are a nation's primary and treasured heritage.

3. For this reason, you would do well, dear Brother Bishops, together to concentrate on this fundamental problem, in order to plan a pastoral and cultural programme that will bring together all the energies of Italian Catholics.

Thus you will give a new and particularly significant impetus to the Christianly-oriented cultural project through which you rightly seek to give a stronger, more incisive cultural form to evangelization, the heart of your concern as Pastors.

In the same perspective, I would like to congratulate you and encourage you on your dedication to promoting an expert Christian presence in social communications, an area as important and influential as it is controversial and challenging. I am particularly pleased by your endeavours to improve the quality and public prestige of the daily paper, "*Avvenire*". I note with pleasure the progress you are making in the area of radio and television broadcasting. It is to be hoped that in turn Italian Catholics will benefit from these instruments that are made available to them for an intelligent reading of social reality that is as fair as possible and fosters genuine values.

4. Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, just a few days ago, accepting a kind invitation, I visited the Italian Parliament. In a very significant way my visit witnessed to the deep and truly special bond that through the centuries has been forged between Italy and the Catholic Church and that, even now, with full respect for each one's reciprocal autonomy, can be a source of helpful collaboration for the benefit of the Italian people.

I am well aware of the close attention you pay as individual Bishops, gathered in the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI), and in your Regional Conferences to this beloved nation's future. In particular, I share with you your concern and care for the family, always recognized as the backbone of social life. The commitment of the Church to the pastoral care of families, which I hope will be more convinced and far-reaching, is a major contribution to the good of the country.

We are required to pay equal attention to the education of the new generations, to their schools. For this reason we can only press for proper, concrete steps forward be taken to bring about scholastic parity.

In an economically and socially difficult period, let us now look closely with effective solidarity at the living standards of many persons and families, affected by poverty in many ways or threatened by the loss of their jobs.

For this and for many other reasons it seems more important and necessary for representatives of

the world of politics, economics, culture and communications, and throughout the fabric of Italian society, to reinforce their attitudes of solidarity and responsibility for the common good of the nation.

5. Concern for one's own country today can never ignore the broader, international context. I therefore express my pleasure at the diligent way in which your Conference follows the events of the European Union in a period that is important for and sensitive to the definition of its institutional order, as it prepared to expand to include the Central-Eastern European nations. In this regard, once again I desire to stress the role that Italy and Italian Catholics can carry out in safeguarding and promoting the Christian roots of European civilization.

In our hearts and in our prayers, we have a deep concern for peace. Together, let us ask God, rich in mercy and forgiveness, to remove the sentiments of hatred in the hearts of whole peoples, to put an end to the horror of terrorism and to guide the steps of national leaders on paths of mutual understanding, solidarity and reconciliation.

Dear Brothers, a short while ago, you and all Italy were overwhelmed by great sorrow, in which I too deeply shared, for the many victims, especially children, of the earthquake in Molise. Let us raise our common, heartfelt prayers to God, first of all, for them and for their families. Let us also pray for the whole of Italy and for each of the Churches entrusted to your pastoral care, so that their great legacy of faith, charity, and Christian culture may be preserved and once again renewed.

With these sentiments I impart to you and to your Churches a special Apostolic Blessing, which I also want to extend to the clergy, religious and faithful, entrusted to your care.

From the Vatican, 15 November 2002.

JOHN PAUL II