



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR GIUSEPPE BALBONI ACQUA,
AMBASSADOR OF ITALY ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 9 January 2004

Mr Ambassador, I am pleased to accept the Letters with which the President of the Italian Republic accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. On this happy occasion I offer you my cordial welcome and warm good wishes for the new year that has just begun. I would like to thank you for bringing me the greetings of the President of Italy and of the Prime Minister. Please reciprocate these sentiments, and convey to them my fervent hope that the Italian people may continue to advance on the path of prosperity and peace, keeping intact the patrimony of religious, spiritual and cultural values that have made their civilization great. In difficult times, the beloved Nation that you represent here has been able to keep its spirit of altruism high, working with a keen sense of responsibility and generous dedication to those who, affected by unfortunate situations, found themselves in need of concrete and effective solidarity. Nor should we forget the active concern to create in the international arena a just order centred on respect for the human being, for his dignity and for his inalienable rights. Such a commitment also entails risks, as was recently demonstrated by the tribute of blood of the soldiers who fell in Iraq, and of Italian volunteers in other parts of the world. I express my heartfelt wishes that with its special gifts of humanity and generosity, Italy will continue to encourage true dialogue and growth especially in the Mediterranean Basin and the Balkan area to which it is geographically close, but also in the Middle East, Afghanistan and on the African Continent. As you pointed out, Mr Ambassador, our millennial ties are very close: they unite the See of Peter and the inhabitants of the Peninsula, whose rich patrimony of Christian values is a living source of inspiration and identity. The Agreement of 18 February 1984 states that the Italian Republic recognizes "the value of the religious culture", taking into account the fact that "the principles of Catholicism are part of the historical heritage of the Italian people" (cf. art. 9, 2). Italy, therefore, is especially entitled to work to ensure that Europe too, in its competent institutions, recognizes its own Christian roots which can guarantee the citizens of the Continent an identity that is neither transitory nor based merely on political and economic interests, but is founded on deep and everlasting values. The ethical foundations and ideals behind the efforts for European unity are even more necessary today, if we want to give stability to the institutional character of the European Union. I would like to encourage the Government and all the Italian political representatives to pursue their efforts in this field. May Italy remind all its sister nations of the extraordinary religious, cultural and civil patrimony that has made Europe great down the centuries. Two important events

in the relations between the Holy See and Italy will be commemorated in the course of the year that has just begun: the 75th anniversary of the Lateran Pacts and the 20th anniversary of the Signing of Agreement of Revision of the Lateran Concordat at Villa Madama. These two events witness how fruitful is the existing collaboration between the contractual parties, a collaboration that has developed through respect for their reciprocal milieus and a constant and serene dialogue, desirous of finding equitable solutions to their mutual needs. The criteria of distinction and legitimate autonomy in their respective roles, mutual esteem and loyal collaboration in the promotion of men and women and the common good, are the principles that inspired the Lateran Pacts and were confirmed in the Agreement of 18 February 1984. It is necessary to draw constant inspiration from these criteria in solving any problems as they arise. In the 20 years that have passed since the Agreement of Villa Madama, the competent Italian Authorities have proceeded to stipulate various integrating agreements provided for in the above-mentioned Agreement. We can thus look with satisfaction at all that so far has been achieved. With regard to any shortcomings, possible developments or finishing touches, it is to be hoped that it will be possible to regularize the Agreement in the same spirit. The Church asks for no privileges, nor does she intend to go beyond the spiritual context proper to her mission. The agreements which originated in this respectful dialogue have the sole purpose of enabling her to carry out her universal task in full freedom and to foster the spiritual good of the Italian people. Indeed, the Church's presence in Italy is beneficial to society as a whole. Mr Ambassador, you have stressed the key role played by the family. Today, in many people's opinion, it is threatened by a misunderstood concept of rights. The Italian Constitution recalls and protects the central role of this "natural society founded on marriage" (art. 29). It is therefore the task of the Government Authorities to make laws that encourage its vitality. The unity of this primary and essential cell of society must be safeguarded; families also expect the social and financial assistance they need to carry out their mission. They are called to play an important educational role, forming mature persons equipped with moral and spiritual values and who are able to live as good citizens. It is important that the State help families without ever stifling the freedom of parents to choose an education, sustaining them and their inalienable rights and efforts to consolidate their nuclear family. Mr Ambassador, these are the reflections that your appreciated visit inspires in my mind. May God make Italy more and more united and supportive. This is my wish, which I accompany with a special prayer. I assure you of my esteem and support in the fulfilment of the mission entrusted to you, as well as the full attention of my collaborators. I reinforce these sentiments with the Apostolic Blessing that I willingly impart to you, to your family and to the beloved Italian

people.

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