



The Holy See

OFFICIAL VISIT OF H.E. Mr GIORGIO NAPOLITANO
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Saturday, 8 June 2013

Mr President of the Republic,

I would like to thank you warmly for this pleasant visit that affords me the opportunity to address my most cordial greeting to you and to the whole Italian people, whose representatives recently elected you for a new mandate in the highest office of the State. I then extend my greeting and my thanks to all the members of the distinguished delegation that has accompanied you.

Your visit, Mr President, fits into our now long history of relations and confirms once again — even after anguishing and painful events — the normality and excellence of relations between Italy and the Holy See. These relations especially developed after the Reconciliation and the insertion of the Lateran Pacts into the Italian Constitution. Hence they fitted into a new perspective following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and the Agreement on the Revision of the Concordat.

It has been reasserted several times by both parties — rightly and without question — that the principal purpose of the dialogue between Italy and the Holy See is the good of the Italian people and that its ideal background is the unique role Italy has played in the history of Europe and of the world. In this regard Italy can truly be an example in the community of peoples. This has been recognized on various occasions by the most diverse figures and in recent times has been obvious from the depth of the relations of esteem and friendship between you, Mr President, and His Holiness Benedict XVI.

Always in the interest of the people and of society, in Italy collaboration between Church and State is lived out in the daily relationship between the civil bodies and those of the Catholic community,

represented by the bishops and their institutions and in a very special way by the Bishop of Rome. This first visit of the President to the Pope — subsequent to the President's participation in the Mass for the inauguration of the Petrine Ministry — can likewise be effectively expressed by the image of the two hills, the Quirinal and the Vatican, that face each other with esteem and liking.

The 17th centenary of the Edict of Milan is being commemorated this year, 2013. It is seen on many sides as a symbol of the first affirmation of the principle of religious freedom. A century ago the celebrations of this event were a milestone in the historical process that encourages awareness and the contribution of Catholics to building Italian society, a contribution that continues to be important for the nation's progress.

In the world today freedom of religion is often talked about rather than put into practice. Indeed, it is forcibly subjected to threats of various kinds and not seldom violated. The serious affronts inflicted on this primary right are a source of grave concern and must see the unanimous reaction of the world's countries in reaffirming the intangible dignity of the human person, against every attack. One and all are duty bound to defend religious freedom and to promote it for everyone. The shared protection of this moral good is also a guarantee of the entire community's growth and development.

In Italy too, as in many other countries, the historical period in which we are living is characterized by a profound and persistent global crisis. This crisis accentuates economic and social problems and is weighing most heavily upon the weakest social strata. Particularly alarming are phenomena such as the undermining of the family and of social bonds, demographic decline, the prevalence of types of logic that give priority to profit rather than to work, and insufficient attention to the younger generations and their training, also with a view to a serene and secure future.

In this certainly far from easy context it is fundamental to guarantee and develop the overall structure of democratic institutions to which in these past decades Italian Catholics have made a crucial, loyal and imaginative contribution. It is urgent that a new view of political commitment develop, especially among young people. It is also urgent that believers and non-believers alike collaborate in promoting a society in which injustice in all its forms may be surmounted and individuals, each and every one, be accepted and permitted to contribute to the common good as befits their dignity and bringing their skills to fruition. The gap between the letter and the spirit of the systems and the democratic institutions, as yet to be recognized, demands the commitment of all those involved, if they are to bridge it anew each time. It is also our duty as Catholics to work harder and harder in a serious process of spiritual conversion to come closer every day to the Gospel that spurs us to carry out an effective practical service to individuals and to society.

Also in the civil context it is true that faith assures us: there is no need to lose hope. How many examples of this have our parents and grandparents given us in their time by facing harsh trials with great courage and a spirit of sacrifice! On several occasions [Benedict XVI](#) reaffirmed that the

current crisis must be an opportunity for a fraternal renewal of human relations.

The Italian people must draw with trust and creativity on the great wealth of its Christian tradition and on the examples of its holy Patrons, Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena. It must also draw on a wide range of both religious and lay figures and on the silent witness of so many women and men. It can and must surmount every division and increase in justice and peace. Thereby it will continue to play its special role in the European context and in the family of nations, and to work to create a culture of encounter.

Mr President, I renew my thanks to you for this most agreeable meeting. Furthermore I am glad to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you and to all the Italians for the warm affection with which they welcomed me after my election: they made me feel at home again! Thank you. May Italy always be a welcoming home to everyone! I assure you of my prayers for this as I impart to you, to your loved ones, to all who serve the Government and to the entire Italian People my truly heartfelt blessing. Many thanks.