



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY CONGRESS
ORGANIZED ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 80th ANNIVERSARY OF VATICAN CITY STATE***

Clementine Hall

Saturday, 14 February 2009

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is with genuine pleasure that I address my cordial greeting to all of you, the organizers, speakers and participants in the Study Congress organized to celebrate the 80th anniversary of [Vatican City State](#). "A small territory for a great mission" is the theme on which you have focused your attention, reflecting together on the spiritual and civil value of this small sovereign State, placed entirely at the service of the important mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to the Apostle Peter and his Successors.

I thank Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo not only for his greeting on your behalf, but also for the commitment which he and his collaborators in the Governorate have undertaken to solemnize the significant milestone of the 80 years of life and activity of Vatican State.

I express my deep pleasure at the celebrations and the various commemorative initiatives of these days that intend to provide a deeper and wider knowledge of the history and features of the *Civitas Vaticana*. Eighty years after its foundation, it constitutes a peacefully acquired reality, although the reasons for its existence and the many tasks it is called to carry out are not always properly understood. Those who work daily at the service of the Holy See or who live in the City take it for granted that there is a tiny sovereign State in the heart of Rome, but not everyone knows that this State is the result of a somewhat turbulent historical process which made its constitution possible, motivated by lofty ideals of faith and far-sighted knowledge of the objectives it would have to achieve. We could thus say that the event, the reason for our meeting today, is an invitation to

look with keener awareness at what [Vatican City State](#) means and is.

When one recalls 11 February 1929, one cannot fail to remember with deep gratitude the person who was the first and principal author and protagonist of the Lateran Pacts, my venerable Predecessor [Pius XI](#): he was the Pope of my childhood to whom we looked with such veneration and love. Rightly, in these days his name has resonated many times, for with his clear foresight and indomitable will, it was he who was the true founder and first architect of Vatican City State. Moreover, the current historical study of his Pontificate allows us to perceive ever better the greatness of Pope Ratti, who guided the Church in the difficult years between the two World Wars. With a firm hand he gave a strong impetus to the multiple dimensions of the Church's action: let us think of her missionary expansion, of her care for the formation of ministers of God, of her promotion of the activity of the lay faithful in the Church and in society and of her intense relationship with the civil community. During his Pontificate, the "Librarian Pope" had to contend with the difficulties and persecution the Church faced in countries such as Mexico and Spain, and with the strife caused by the emergence and consolidation of totalitarianism national socialism and fascism in those years. His great Encyclical [Mit brennender Sorge](#) is not forgotten in Germany as a strong signal against nazism. One is filled with admiration for the wise and strong achievements of this Pontiff, who only wanted for the Church that freedom which would allow her to carry out her mission integrally. [Vatican City State](#), which came into being subsequent to the Lateran Pacts and in particular the Treaty, was also considered by [Pius XI](#) as a means of guaranteeing the necessary independence from every human power in order to enable the Church and her Supreme Pastor to accomplish fully the mandate received from Christ the Lord. How useful and beneficial this small but complete State was to the Holy See, to the Church and to Rome and the whole world was seen just ten years later, at the outbreak of the Second World War, a war whose violence and suffering reached the Vatican gates.

Thus it may be said that throughout the eight decades of its existence, the [Vatican State](#) has proven itself a flexible instrument equal to the demands made on it and that continue to be made on it by the mission of the Pope, the needs of the Church and the ever mutating conditions of society. For this very reason, under the guidance of my venerable Predecessors from the Servant of God [Pius XII](#) to Pope [John Paul II](#) there has been, and still today there is, visible to all, a continuous adaptation of the norms, structures and the means of this unique State built around the tomb of the Apostle Peter. The significant anniversary which we are commemorating in these days is thus a motive for deep thanksgiving to the Lord who guides the destiny of his Church through often turbulent events in the sea of history, and helps his Vicar on earth in carrying out his office as *Christianae religionis summus Antistes*. My gratitude is extended to all those who in the past and today have been and are protagonists in the life of [Vatican City State](#), some who are well known but many others whose humble and valuable work is unknown. I extend my grateful thoughts to the members of the present-day community of life and work of the Governorate and of the other structures of the State, thus interpreting the sentiments of the entire People of God. At the same time I would like to encourage those who are working in the various offices and Vatican

services fulfilling their duties not only with honesty and professional skill, but also with an ever keener awareness that their work is an invaluable service to the cause of God's Kingdom.

The *Civitas Vaticana* is, in truth, an almost invisible point on the geographical maps of the world, a minute and defenceless State unequipped with dreaded armies, seemingly insignificant in the great international geo-political strategies. Yet this visible guarantee of the absolute independence of the Holy See was and is the centre of outreach of a constant action on behalf of solidarity and the common good. And is it not perhaps true that for this very reason this small piece of land is watched everywhere with great attention? [Vatican State](#), which contains treasures of faith, history and art, preserves a precious patrimony for all humanity. From its heart, where the Pope lives close to the tomb of St Peter, a ceaseless message rises of true social progress, of hope, of reconciliation and of peace. Now, this State of ours, after solemnly commemorating the 80th anniversary of its foundation, continues on its way with greater apostolic zeal. May Vatican City increasingly be a true "city on the hill", which shines thanks to the convictions and generous devotion of all who work in it at the service of the ecclesial mission of the Successor of Peter. With this hope, as I invoke the maternal protection of Mary, the intercession of Sts Peter and Paul and of the other martyrs who hallowed this ground with their blood, I willingly impart my Blessing to all of you who are gathered here, extending it with affection to the great family of Vatican City State.

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