



The Holy See

ADDRESS TO THE ITALIAN PRESIDENT H.E. MR CARLO AZEGLIO CIAMPI*

Tuesday, 19 October 1999

Mr President,

1. It is always a great joy for the Successor of Peter to meet the Head of the Italian State, mindful as he is of the unique contribution that this country has made to all Christianity, and aware, at the same time, of the mark made by the Christian faith, during these two millennia, on the formation and flourishing of the Italian national identity.

I therefore, extend a very cordial welcome to you, Mr President, thankful for the visit with which you honour me today. I extend this sentiment of gratitude also to the distinguished members of the delegation accompanying you.

In you I greet all the Italian people, whom I appreciate and love for the many signs of affection they have always shown me. They are a people that has always been very close, not only geographically, to the See of Peter, since the time when the Fisherman of Galilee landed on the shores of the peninsula. This meeting confirms the good harmony that exists in Church-State relations, thanks to an enduring understanding that has promoted a joint commitment in serving the good of the Italian community, so rich in culture, art, history, and marked by that civilization rooted in Christianity which has made it famous and honoured throughout the world.

2. Italy enjoys close relations with her sister nations in Europe, and I am pleased to recall that your visit, Mr President, coincides with the Synod being held in the Vatican, at which representatives of the European Episcopates are addressing old and new problems in the Church's life on the continent. And if certain tragedies of a not too distant past, tragedies of which we ourselves were witnesses, appear today to be overcome, society is nevertheless facing issues and challenges that are critical for individuals and for social organization as a whole.

Europe, which has achieved unexpected levels of well-being, today has the task of reflecting on itself to adapt its structures in order to pursue higher aims that until now were perhaps scarcely imagined. This progress cannot be only economic. The availability of material goods and the much discussed prospect of "unlimited development" require that the economic dimension of European society be enriched and indeed crowned by a "centrality of the soul". The spiritual dimension is irrepressible: on its acceptance depends the formation of a human society in which the personal dignity of its every member is safeguarded and properly developed. In this context, it is essential for public authorities to acknowledge those basic human values which are the foundation of society. A pluralistic State does not mean an agnostic State.

3. The universal nature of the Roman Pontificate gives the Successor of Peter a specific responsibility for all peoples. His vocation is to be a servant of peace, according to the words of Isaiah regarding the future Messiah, whom the prophet saw as the "Prince of Peace", even foretelling a "peace [with] no end", because based on "justice and ... righteousness" (*Is 9: 6-7*). The end of the hostility of past times, in which the great European nations did not, unfortunately, distinguish themselves, does not exempt us from vigilance, so that the afflictions that struck previous generations may not recur, even if perhaps in distant areas and with new modalities.

The Successor of Peter expects much from Italy, and not without reason, given that for many decades it has enshrined in the fundamental law of its society, the Constitution of the Republic, the rejection of war "as an offensive instrument against the freedom of other peoples and as a means for resolving international controversies" (Art. 11). This is why in the Balkans, in the Mediterranean, in the Third World, wherever there are outbreaks of that antihuman fire which is what war really is, Italy, in keeping with its Christian roots and the cultural options that distinguish it, is trying to make its decisive and distinctive contribution of friendship and human solidarity.

4. Italy, thank God, is at peace: it is important that this situation continue, because it is only in the context of peace that the complex problems which the nation must deal with can be faced and suitably solved. There is life to be safeguarded from conception and guaranteed its natural evolution with love and dignity. It is born and grows in the family, the basic cell on which the nation depends and which deserves to be ever better assisted with timely interventions for the achievement of its essential social function.

Then there is the school, which must be free and open to the moral and intellectual growth of the younger generation. How can we fail to recognize the opportuneness of developing a great variety of educational experiences in which the family, based on marriage, and social groups may concretely express their convictions?

Finally there is work, which today more than ever recalls the biblical command that obliges man to transform the world. Just as the public authorities have duties towards life, the family and the school, so they must, by every means, help people to express their creative potential: it would be

a serious fault to remain indifferent and to confine the younger generation to a corruptive idleness that mars the dignity of the person and the citizen, now recognized by all.

5. The Church, in all her components, is ready to collaborate with the public authorities and, indeed, with the national society, of which she is a significant and distinguishing part. She willingly makes her energies available to this country too, which in many ways is so near and dear to her.

She does so with respect for her specific mission, which is to proclaim the Gospel to every person: only in this way, in fact, can human history evolve over time in a way that fully corresponds to the plan of man's Creator and Redeemer.

The Church pursues the true good of the country, to which she contributes by her fidelity to Christ and by creative innovation in the fields of education, culture, assistance and many forms of witness proper to her, while holding firm to her indispensable idea of man and of the meaning of social relations.

6. It is with these sentiments and these hopes that we look to the now imminent opening of the Jubilee of the 2,000th anniversary of the Incarnation of the Son of God. On this occasion, millions and millions of people will come to Rome. They will be welcomed with the traditional and well-proven hospitality of the Italian people, but this too will be a further responsibility that weighs on the two realities, the State and the Church, which today are visibly meeting in this visit and whose relations are characterized by significant cooperation.

While I am grateful for what the Italian authorities are doing for the success of the Jubilee Year, I express my hope that this effort will continue with the same effectiveness in the coming months, in order to ensure that pilgrims from every part of the world will receive the attentive and caring welcome that they expect.

7. I am pleased to end these words with the cordial wish that the Italian nation, with your help, Mr President, will advance on the path of authentic progress, gathering from its rich traditions of civilization new impulses for the promotion of those human and Christian values that have won it esteem and prestige in the concert of nations.

With these wishes, I express my fervent hope for the successful accomplishment of the lofty mandate that you have just begun, as I warmly invoke upon you, upon your wife, upon the authorities here present and upon all the Italian people, the constant protection of the Almighty.

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