



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS PAUL VI TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO THE HOLY SEE*

Monday, 12 December 1977

Mr. Ambassador.

The noble, respectful words that you have just addressed to us in the act of presenting the Letters of Credence as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Italian Republic to the Holy See, arouse within us, as immediate and spontaneous response, feelings of deep gratitude for what you kindly said about our Person, and no less deep satisfaction at the state of mind in which you are preparing to carry out your high mission.

The presentation of the Letters of Credence is certainly not a purely formal act or performance, but marks a significant stage in the course of the bilateral relations between States or Sovereign bodies. We are of the opinion that a meeting of this kind is never an empty ceremony, far less so in the present case, so multiple and extraordinary are the bonds that unite Italy and the Holy See and so close is the interconnection between the "Sedes Beati Petri", centred in Rome, and the Italian State, of which the same city is the capital.

You conjured up before our eyes, Mr. Ambassador, an Italy striving – as is in the aspirations of its generous and ingenious sons – to find the ways to a higher cultural and civil development, as well as to a justice and security in keeping with the legitimate expectations of the social forces operating in it: intent, furthermore, on pursuing forms of more organic union with the countries of the European Community and fruitful relations of friendship, peace and cooperation with the other nations in the world.

Before this image of a modern, mature and dynamic Italy, the Holy See cannot but express its satisfaction, spurring it to offer other peoples – as in the past, and more than in the past – that incomparable heritage of wisdom; balance, kindness and faith, of which it is the bearer in the

world.

You did not fall, however, to mention the difficulties created also at the present moment by the economic crisis which affects practically all the continents. On our side, we cannot pass over in silence, with a concern that is a manifestation of our special interest and our affection, other factors such as in particular the repeated manifestations of violence which make the life of Italy less serene, and less sure its longed-for progress towards more advanced goals of tranquillity in the concord of citizens, towards prosperity in the active collaboration of the different elements of society, and towards security in staunch faithfulness to the moral values that are at the basis of individual conduct and of family and social unity.

All the deeper and more cordial is our wish that Italy will be able to overcome, soon and successfully, the difficult present moment and find the ways to a more and more orderly and peaceful civil society, respectful of the rights and legitimate interests of all, and beneficial for everyone.

Your mission to us, Mr. Ambassador, begins in the midst of the work intended to prepare, by mutual consent, those amendments of the Concordat in force between Italy and the Holy See that are seen to be opportune or necessary in consideration of the political and social evolution that has taken place in Italy, particularly since the moment when the latter, approving its new Constitution, had solemnly confirmed the recognition of the Lateran Pacts for the regulation of the relations between State and Church.

We share the hope that the negotiations in progress – in which the Holy See has endeavored to proceed in faithfulness to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council – will be able promptly to reach a satisfactory conclusion, in the exercise of that dialogue to which we have attached such importance from the beginning of our Pontificate, dedicating to it our first Encyclical Letter (cf. AAS. 1964, .LVI, pp. 637 ff.).

Is dialogue relevant in our days, is it still valid? We answer in the affirmative; but, perhaps, it has become more difficult. This is what is to be thought, if we keep in mind the events and the changes, of different order and sign, which have taken place, precipitated by a movement of transformation which seems to have affected, prior to persons and things, morals and mentality. Yet this recognition of the greater difficulty of dialogue does not dispense us from the duty of cultivating it. Dialogue is, in fact, a conversation that stimulates the spiritual faculties; it is a sincere effort of understanding. It is the will, or rather the good will, to arrive at an agreement; and agreements accord, – as an unforgotten teacher and practitioner of law, who was also a man of deep faith, Prof. Francesco Carnelutti, liked to explain and inculcate – is the meeting of hearts ("cor ad cor"). That is to say, it is harmony established among persons, which precedes, as its indispensable moral and human substratum, all juridical stipulation.

If there is dialogue, if there is this interior attitude, then it is possible to settle questions even if they are intimate and – as in the case of relations between State and Church – rightful regard becomes prevalent for the common good of all those – citizens and faithful – who belong at the same time, to both societies. Then the ecclesial and the civil communities meet, to their mutual advantage to reach an understanding and to collaborate in a service which is addressed to the same recipients.

We desire to wish Italy a future of prosperity, cohesion and exemplarity in the international family of peoples, also to correspond to the really unique situation that has been reserved for it, to give hospitality – in the heart of its territory – to the centre and the heart of the Catholic world.

We desire to wish the Church in Italy such a growth that the elements that constitute its faith and its Catholic tradition may turn out to benefit civil life itself and, therefore, all citizens.

We also desire to wish that the peaceful relations between this Apostolic See and Italy may be maintained and have, in fact, a consistent, balanced and fruitful development.

We are glad to seal this threefold wish by invoking on this land, loved and privileged by God, the continual outpouring of his favours, as a token of which we impart to the whole Italian nation, to its Head as well as to you, who are his worthy representative, the Apostolic Blessing.

*ORa n.52 p.2.