



The Holy See

*Discurso al Embajador de ITALIA,
Excmo. Sr. Don Andrea CAGIATI**

21 de diciembre de 1985

Mr. Ambassador,

1. I thank you from the heart for the noble words you have been pleased to address to me as you begin your mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. In receiving from your hands the Letters of Credence my mind turns with sentiments of respectful esteem to the President of the Republic, Mr. Francesco Cossiga whom I had the pleasure of receiving at the beginning of October of last year, on the occasion of his first official visit outside of national territory and whom I will be visiting in the Quirinal next January.

Succeeding your worthy predecessor in the high office, you will have the honour of representing the entire Italian people which has always been so near to my heart because of its faith and because of its thousand – year history, because of its capacity to overcome and to conquer recurring difficulties, because of so many bonds of closeness and of devotion that bind it to the See of Peter. This people has been particularly dear to me from the time of my youthful formation, which had its crowning in the Eternal City. Pastoral attention to the Universal Church, periodic journeys to every part of the world, where the Gospel of the Lord is spreading like a tree that grows and sends forth its branches, cannot make me forget the daily relationships with a nation which I consider my second fatherland. The affection, then, of the Italian people and its sentiments of sincere attachment I have occasion to experience continuously, in Rome as well as in the various regions of the country.

2. On an occasion such as this it is natural, especially for those who, like myself, were born elsewhere, to render testimony to the cultural and artistic heritage of this privileged nation, to its moral, human and Christian richness, to the flowering of sanctity that has come forth from it in

every age as from a vital spring, to the edification of the Church and to the benefit of humanity.

In the train of such glorious traditions, from the beginning of my pastoral service for the whole Church, I have hoped for the continuance and the development of that harmony of relationships between Italy and the Holy See, which, since the time of the Lateran Agreements, has been promoted and profitably safeguarded. In the relations between the two parties, there has in fact been established a positive level of equilibrium, which serves the common good of the Italian people and of the Church, contributes not a little to the preservation of internal peace and favours the social and civil progress of the country.

It is an equilibrium founded on respective autonomy, understood as conscious expression of the liberty proper to each, on reciprocal competences necessarily distinct and faithfully observed. It is an equilibrium that years of reflection and of study have seen fit to redefine in light of the changes in the institutional picture of the Italian Republic and of the vast horizons opened by the Second Vatican Council. Such a rethinking led to the recent agreement of modification of the Concordat, which opens new perspectives of relationships, marked by mutual respect, confidence and collaboration so as to be able to meet the religious, moral and cultural needs of the people of our time.

3. The harmony of values and of objectives, to which you, Mr. Ambassador, rightly made reference, calls the Church and the Italian State to overcome the difficulties of the way, to meet on the common terrain of highly relevant activities, so as to contribute to resolving the many problems that closely touch modern industrialized societies: promotion of man and of his development, understanding among the nations, assistance to the poor countries, self-determination of the oppressed peoples, fight against drugs, violence, hunger in the world.

The Church, animated by the spirit of the Gospel, is at work fomenting in men's hearts, especially those of the youth, an openness toward the great and true values of love, liberty, brotherly solidarity, peace, social justice. These are the values that build the future and the greatness of an authentically civilized country.

It is for this reason that the Church, placing man at the centre of its own pastoral task, continues to proclaim at the top of her voice the respect and the sacredness of life, which every rightful State should place at the summit of its concerns.

If civilization is measured by the recognition and the effective safeguarding of the rights of the person, it appears evident that it is a duty to give absolute precedence to the life of every individual human being and to guarantee it in every moment of the span of its existence.

For the same reason, the Church, enlightened by the faith received from above, strives to defend the precious values of matrimony and of the family, without which it is not possible to ensure, in a

manner worthy of the human person, the promotion of man and of woman, nor to contribute to the renewal of society (cf. *Familiaris Consortio* 3 and following). It is comforting to observe, by the way, that in Italy, in spite of signs of disturbing decline in fundamental values, the family, in the majority of cases, still continues to hold its role.

4. My confidence, placed first of all in the help of God, resides next in the healthy vitality of the new generations, which, having now, I hope, overcome the shocks of dangerous bewilderment, are showing signs of feeling ever more drawn to the rediscovery of the great and perennial ideals, with regard to the building, for themselves and for society, of a better future.

Nor can I forget the generous and illuminating activity of the pastors of the Church that is in Italy and of those – priests, religious, lay persons engaged in the various forms of apostolate – who collaborate with them. Their recognized contribution to the life of the national community is a ground of hope for the future.

While assuring you of my esteem, Mr. Ambassador, I impart to you from the heart the Apostolic Blessing, which I would like to extend to the persons who accompany you, to your family, to the entire and dear Italian nation.

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