



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
TO H.E. Mr SERGIO MATTARELLA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY***

Saturday, 18 April 2015

[Multimedia]

Mr President,

I am grateful to you for your visit, which you are making only two months after being elected by the Representatives of the Italian People to the State's highest office. This act demonstrates the excellent relations which exist between the Holy See and Italy, and it is in continuity with the visits made by your immediate predecessor and with a now long tradition which, since the Conciliar period in particular, has seen more frequent occasions for meetings between the supreme Civil Authorities of Italy and those of the Universal Church.

The Lateran Pacts, recognized by the Republican Constitutional Charter, and the Agreement on the Revision of the above documents have offered a solid framework within which relations between Italy and the Holy See have peacefully developed and been strengthened, guaranteeing each its respective sovereignty and independence, and at the same time mutual orientation for effective cooperation, on the basis of shared values and in view of the common good.

It is indeed fundamental that, in the distinction of roles and competencies and in the full respect of reciprocal functions, there always be felt the necessity for renewed cooperation, directed at joining forces for the good of all citizens, who have the right to this concordance, from which they derive innumerable benefits.

The Church offers to all the beauty of the Gospel and its message of salvation, and needs, in order to carry out her spiritual mission, conditions of peace and tranquility, which the public powers alone can foster.

On the other hand, these latter, with whom the responsibility primarily rests for providing the

conditions for equitable and sustainable development, in order for civil society to wield all of its potential, find valid and helpful support for their action in the Church's commitment and loyal cooperation.

Reciprocal autonomy in fact does not diminish but exalts joint responsibility for the actual human being and for the spiritual and material needs of the community, which we all have the task of serving with humility and dedication.

It follows that a healthy pluralism will not be closed to the specific contribution offered by the various ideal and religious elements which compose society, provided, of course, that they respect the fundamental principles which govern civil life and that they neither exploit nor distort their convictions in the interests of violence or subjugation. In other words, the orderly development of a pluralistic civil society presupposes that it does not seek to limit the authentic religious spirit in the intimacy of the conscience alone, but also recognizes its important role in building up society, legitimizing the valuable contribution it is able to offer.

Italy's history clearly shows how great Christianity's contribution has been to its culture and to the character of its people, as the Christian faith has permeated the country's art, architecture and customs. The faith has been transformed into works and these into institutions, to actually give a face to a particular history, and shaping nearly all aspects of life, beginning with the family, the first and indispensable bulwark of solidarity and the school of values. The family must be supported in carrying out its irreplaceable social function as the fundamental locus of a person's growth.

Mr President, among the different requisites for the development of every collective body, work is characterized by its ties with the very dignity of the person, with the opportunity to build a dignified and free existence. In a special way, the shortage of development for young people is becoming a cry of anguish which challenges the public powers, the intermediate organizations, private entrepreneurs and the ecclesial community to make every effort to remedy the situation, by giving the proper priority to resolving this problem. Indeed, the opportunity to work contains the very possibility of dignity and future.

For the orderly growth of society it is essential that the young generations, through employment, have the opportunity to plan their future with peace of mind, freeing them from the precariousness and risk of giving in to deceptive and dangerous temptations. All those who hold positions of special responsibility thus have the primary task of addressing this problem with courage, creativity and generosity.

Another sphere which today requires particular attention from everyone is care for the environment. In seeking to alleviate the growing imbalances and pollution, which at times cause veritable environmental disasters, there is a need to be fully aware of the effects of our actions on creation, which are closely linked to the manner in which mankind considers and treats itself (cf.

Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 51).

Within the next few days the universal exhibition will open in Milan, with the theme: “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”. The Expo event will be an important occasion for the exhibition of the newest technologies necessary to guarantee healthy, safe and adequate food for all peoples, while respecting the environment. May it also be instrumental in deepening reflection on the cause of environmental degradation, so as to provide the competent authorities with a framework of indispensable know — how and experience to take effective decisions and to preserve the health of the planet which God entrusted to the care of the human race.

Lastly I should like to express my gratitude for Italy’s generous commitment to welcoming the numerous immigrants who, risking their lives, ask to be received. It is obvious that the proportions of the phenomenon require much broader involvement. We must not tire of requesting a more extensive commitment at the European and international levels.

Mr President, in formulating my most cordial wish for the fulfillment of your lofty office, I hope that Italy, in enhancing its noble traditions and culture, largely inspired by the Christian faith, may advance and prosper in harmony, offering its valuable contribution to peace and justice in the world.

May God protect Italy and each one of its inhabitants.