



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Dr CENSU TABONE
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF MALTA***

Monday, 18 December 1989

Mr President,

1. It is with great pleasure that I welcome you on the occasion of your State Visit to the Vatican. I am grateful for your kind words, which have evoked Malta's impressive heritage of Christian faith, and the firm and persevering bond of communion which has always existed between your Country and the Apostolic See. In offering you my warm personal greetings, I ask you to convey to all the Maltese people the assurance of my deep affection and my prayers that God, our Heavenly Father, will bless them in Christ with every spiritual blessing (Cfr. *Eph.* 1, 3).

As the Bishop of Rome, charged by God's grace and call with the mission of confirming my brothers and sisters in the faith (Cfr. *Luc.* 22, 32), I am very much aware of the significance of my forthcoming Pastoral Visit to Malta. For almost two thousand years, since the very dawn of the Christian era, the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been preached and has taken root among the Maltese people. I am confident that as the Successor of Peter visits Malta for the first time in her history, he will be met with the same extraordinary kindness (Cfr. *Act.* 28, 2) with which the Apostle Paul and his fellow-travellers were met when they set foot upon her shores.

2. Saint Paul's stay on the island of Melita was relatively brief: The Acts of the Apostles tell us that he set sail for Rome after only three months (Cfr. *ibid.* 28, 11). Yet the arrival of the Apostle of the Gentiles was to prove of decisive importance for the entire future of Malta and her people. Through Paul's preaching, the Christian faith was first implanted. In the centuries that followed, the faith was to leave an indelible imprint upon your Nation's history and character.

Today too, "the Catholic Faith that comes from the Apostles" (Cfr. "Prex Eucharistica" I) continues

to inspire and foster in Malta's people a commitment to those spiritual and moral values which are indispensable for the authentic well-being and growth of the Nation: values such as respect for human life from the first moment of its existence until natural death, the marriage bond, the unity of the family, religious education, the dignity of all workers, and effective solidarity. It is essential that these fundamental human and social values should be safeguarded and furthered through appropriate laws and decisions.

3. In her ministry of forming the inhabitants of Malta in the faith, the Church has sought to provide them with the strength which comes from the preaching of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments, while serving their material and spiritual needs with the various works of the apostolate. Her efforts, especially on behalf of the less privileged, have contributed in no small way to the growth of the Maltese people's sensitivity of the human dignity of each and every person both as an individual and as a member of that larger community which is the Nation.

In our own days, the Church has not lessened her commitment to the noble task of serving the good of man. Working with the means and methods that are properly hers, and especially in the field of education, she strives to enable men and women to acknowledge God's many gifts and to respond to the call of his grace. In forming good Christians, she seeks also to form good citizens, for she knows the Gospel's power to inspire in those who hear and welcome it a firm commitment to virtues which guarantee the genuine progress of individuals and societies. In the light of God's Word, mankind is taught to balance individual and group interests with the demands of the common good, to see in political activity a service to neighbour, and to respect both the truth and the rights of others. In the school of the Gospel, Christians come to know the value of tolerance and dialogue; they learn to long, for social justice and solidarity among peoples, and they grow in concern for the underprivileged and for the protection of fundamental human rights.

4. Hence, when the Church seeks to engage in dialogue and frank collaboration with the State, she is not led by a desire to enjoy a privileged status at the expense of the State's legitimate sovereignty, nor a desire to encroach upon areas and responsibilities alien to her. Rather, she desires to balance her activity within the areas of competence proper to her with the activities of the State in the realm of its own competence. Since both Church and State work for the good of the same people, who are at once Christians and citizens, their fruitful collaboration brings with it the promise of great benefits not only for individual believers but for society as a whole.

The collaboration of the Holy See with States, a collaboration in which the Catholic Bishops are associated, is but one expression of the continuous concern of the Supreme Pastor for all the Churches (Cfr. *2Cor.* 11, 28). In this regard, I am pleased to recall the talks which have been under way for some time in Malta between the Holy See and the civil Authorities, and have resulted in the signing of several important agreements. It is my fervent hope that with God's grace and the continued good will of both parties involved, other projected agreements will also soon be signed.

5. Mr President, I am pleased to take note of the positions which the Maltese Government has taken on an international level in defence of values intimately connected with the dignity of the human person, such as the problems of the elderly and the protection of the environment. These positions reflect something of the rich moral and civil identity of the Maltese people as it has developed throughout its long history.

For centuries, Malta has stood at the crossroads of historical development in the Mediterranean region. Indeed, her geographical position, her history and culture, would seem to confer on your Country.

Mr President, a special vocation to act as a mediator and promoter of peace in the complex situations affecting the entire area. It is my confident prayer that Malta will respond to that challenge with wise and generous dedication.

Despite its small size, Malta has played no mean role in the promotion and defence of the social and religious values which stand at the foundations of Europe's cultural identity. The task which faces our society today is one that calls for a deep, even heroic spiritual resolve. If Europe is to be faithful to its heritage and promise, it must take up once again those noble spiritual ideals which inspired the building of her cities the growth of her universities and the binding together of its diverse peoples in a common faith, a common vision, expressed in a wealth of religious, cultural and juridical achievements. In the past months, new and promising signs of hope have sprung up about us. It is my fervent prayer that Malta, in full fidelity to her noble past and committed to building a future filled with hope, will play a leading role in promoting new forms of collaboration among peoples for the welfare and authentic progress of all.

In making this prayer, I invoke God's gifts of grace and peace upon all the people of Malta, whom I look forward to meeting during my forthcoming Visit.

May God abundantly bless Your Excellency and all your fellow-citizens.

Il-Milied it-tajjeb lilek, Eccellenza, u lill-poplu kollu ta Malta y Ghawdex.

(Happy Christmas to Your Excellency and to all the people of Malta and Gozo!)

*AAS 82 (1990), p. 780-783.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XII, 2 pp. 1572-1576.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1989 pp. 990-992.

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