



The Holy See

VISITA PASTORALE A MALTA

INCONTRO DI GIOVANNI PAOLO II

CON IL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA

NEL PALAZZO DEI GRAN MAESTRI

La Valletta (Malta) - Venerdì, 25 maggio 1990

Mr President,

Mr Prime Minister,

Mr Speaker,

Honourable Members of Government, of Parliament and of the Judiciary,

Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address you at the beginning of my Pastoral Visit to Malta. As the first Pope to set foot on these islands, I am conscious of the significance of my visit not only for the members of the Catholic Church but *for the entire Maltese nation*. At the dawn of the Christian era, you ancestors received the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the preaching of the Apostle Paul as he made his way to Rome. In the centuries that followed, the faith taught and professed in communion with the Successor of Peter took firm root in the life and culture of Malta's people. It is my hope that the presence of the Bishop of Rome in your midst will recall *the unique and lasting contribution which the Christian faith has made*, and continues to make, in shaping

your identity as a nation and fostering its growth.

I thank you most heartily, Mr President, for your kind words of welcome and for favouring the realization of this visit. I rejoice in this opportunity to pay homage to the faith of the Maltese people and to proclaim the Gospel and celebrate the Eucharist in communion with the Pastors and faithful of the Churches of Malta and Gozo. During my visit, I hope to encourage and support all those who, amid the challenges and opportunities of the present time, remain committed to the impressive heritage of Christian values which your nation has received from generations past and which remains the sure pledge of her continued development in the future. As the bearers of an ancient tradition of faith, Malta's Catholics are increasingly required, on this eve of the Third Christian Millennium, to deepen their awareness of this tradition, applying its wisdom and insights to the task of building a modern society worthy in every way of their noble land.

2. In our time, there is a growing consensus that the social and political life of nations must be founded upon absolute *respect for the inalienable dignity and rights of each human person*, regardless of race, religious beliefs or political opinions. In two World wars, as well as in the great changes which are now taking place in Central and Eastern Europe, we have seen entire peoples reject structures of power which effectively denied or betrayed their legitimate aspirations to live in a social order marked by freedom, justice and peace. As you are well aware, *the task of establishing such a social order requires great patience, clear vision and moral maturity*. Above all else, it demands of each individual and social group a firm commitment to the pursuit of the common good. Also required is a forthright *resolve to encourage respectful dialogue* among all sectors of national life, while promoting laws and policies which safeguard the freedom and dignity of every citizen, with particular regard for the underprivileged and the most vulnerable, for the rights of families and those of workers. In the end, a nation's commitment to these values will be gauged by its efforts to see them ensured through widespread participation in the democratic process, the fair administration of justice and the fostering of a strong sense of social solidarity.

I am confident that these values will continue to inspire the future development of your country. I likewise trust that the *nation's leaders*—legislators, public officials, members of the judiciary and politicians— as well as *private groups and individual citizens*, will be vigilant so that these principles are never sacrificed to tendencies which may arise from the influx of ideas or patterns of behaviour alien to Malta's Christian tradition.

3. Having always taken an active part in the life of the nation, *the Catholic Church wishes to offer her proper contribution* to the progress of the Maltese people. Drawing from her centuries-old experience of assisting both individuals and society, the Church in Malta is deeply aware of her obligation to interpret the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the present day in a manner consonant with her religious mission. As the Bishops at the Second Vatican Council had occasion to point out, the Church is motivated by no earthly ambition (Cfr. *Gaudium et Spes*, 3), and " has no desire to become involved in the

government of the temporal order "(*Ad Gentes*, 12). Instead, she is committed to carry on Christ's work by faithfully labouring for the salvation of all mankind and each individual, " considered whole and entire, with body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will " (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3).

As she bears witness to the love of Jesus Christ, the Church strives to unite all people of good will in a spirit of mutual respect and effective solidarity (*Ibid.*). In her ministry, she " heals and elevates the dignity of the human person,... consolidates society and endows the daily activity of men with a deeper sense and meaning " (*Ibid.* 40). Indeed, by being faithful to her identity and proper mission, the Church is convinced that she " can contribute much to humanizing the family of man and its history through each of its members and its community as a whole " (*Guardium et Spes*, 40).

Consequently, it is in the interest of everyone that the Church in the first place, as well as all those who are genuinely concerned for the good of individuals and society, should strive to preserve the Church's autonomy of action. It is important that the Church should enjoy freedom in the institutional and administrative spheres and that she should be free from all undue pressures, obstacles and manipulation. In a word, it is essential that the Church should be enabled to act effectively in fulfilling her mission to all people, showing herself to be what she truly is— the mother of all the baptized (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium*, 64), and, in a certain sense, of all mankind. Following the indications of the Second Vatican Council, *the Church*, in solidarity with the entire human family, *expresses her love for that family by entering into dialogue* with it on all the problems that affect it (Cfr. *Guardium et Spes*, 3).

In this regard, I cannot fail to note positive results from the *continuing talks between the Maltese Government and the Holy See*, the latter acting in close cooperation with Malta's Bishops. So far, these talks have borne fruit in agreements which express and promote values which are an essential part of Malta's historical, cultural and institutional patrimony, while also enabling the Church to continue to offer her contribution to that patrimony in full accordance with her distinct character and the requirements of her universal law. I am confident that in matters of common interest and with respect for the highest principles of freedom, justice and democracy, further agreements will soon be concluded.

4. Within the international community, Malta is widely respected for *its initiatives aimed at strengthening understanding, cooperation, peace, and well-being among peoples*. I am pleased to express also the Holy See's appreciation for these initiatives.

The presence among us of the many *diplomats accredited to the Republic of Malta* reflects the high esteem which your nation enjoys within the international community. In thanking them for their kind presence both at my arrival and at this ceremony, I ask them to convey to their respective Heads of State, Governments and people my warm greetings and best wishes. Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps: it is my fervent hope that your efforts to promote harmonious and mutually beneficial relations between your nations and the Republic of Malta will

make a lasting contribution to the security and progress both of the Mediterranean area and of the entire world.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I am deeply grateful for the kindness and hospitality with which you have welcomed me. As I continue my Pastoral Visit, I cordially invoke upon you and upon all the beloved people of Malta the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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