

## In the past what made Italy great? The answer is simple -- God

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*The Coliseum in Rome, Italy*

Two thousand years ago people with ideals walked the streets of Rome. Five hundred years ago people with similar ideals inspired the whole world in the Renaissance. Italy was truly great.

What made Italy great? The answer is simple -- GOD. God could bless Italy when Italy worked for Him. This means, when Italian people truly loved and cared for their brothers. The Roman Empire, of course, was created by their military. But this was normal in Roman times. The Roman army was actually just and merciful by contemporary standards. The real inspiration of Rome was in their ideals. The motto of Rome was Piety, Fidelity, Mercy and Justice. The Romans cried to bring these ideals to others. Most of their territory was won, not by attacking other nations, but actually by defending themselves or others from aggressive enemies. The Romans were humanitarian; they loved their brother. Rome was also founded on a strong family unit that was very religious. In such an environment, love could develop. Romans were also very joyful people, with many games and sports and a great love of human relationships. The quality of life in Rome was very high compared too much of history before and after. The Renaissance was also an idealistic time. People really searched for truth and beauty not just looking for it but seeking to express it in the greatest way possible. No other nation could equal the quality of Italian art.

The Renaissance was also a humanitarian period. The most influential philosophy was a Platonic one based on a pure and ideal kind of love. People lived for their ideals. A beautiful story comes from this period of Italian history. It is the story of the praying hands, statues of which can be found all over the world, reminding us of the spirit of true sacrifice.

Two devoted friends with much talent wanted to become great artists, but they had no money to learn. To become a master artist required long and expensive training, so they made an agreement. They would draw straws and the winner would go to train and the other would work to support him. When the first was trained, then he would support his friend's training through his art. The friends parted and the one studying went to his place of study, receiving every penny that his friend could send for several years. His friend did not even have enough money to visit him, because he sent everything.

When the artist returned after several years, overjoyed that he could now help his friend, he discovered that his friend had changed much. His body was bent and his hands crippled from doing the hardest labor to earn the most money. He could not hold a paintbrush properly anymore. But all this time his friend had told him nothing about this, because he did not want to worry him. He worked hard for many years, watching his body being destroyed by the hard labor and realizing that no longer could he realize his goal. So he put everything into helping his friend become the greatest, most perfect artist possible. His artist friend cried when he saw him, but the one who had worked was not upset. He could fulfill his ideal in another.

The purpose of this story is to explain the spirit and heart of Italy. This spirit of sacrifice and service is a characteristic of Italian people -- no less today than in the glorious Renaissance. This was why God could bless Italy.

Since that time Italy has gone through much humiliation and difficulty, but their positive attitude towards man has given them perseverance. The Italian people are just as joyful today as the Romans. They love their brother no less than the Renaissance Italians. What then is the problem today?

The problem is selfishness.

We do not yet have a clear ideal that we can work for together. Italy was great only when the people were working together. When we cause conflict in order to promote our own ideal, our ideal becomes unrealizable. Somehow we have to learn how to love one another in the right way. We have to find a common ideal that we can work for together. We have to express the spirit of sacrifice and service again. We have to live for others. We can do this.

We stand today at a point of history when man can go in two opposite directions. One is towards selfishness and destruction; the other is towards love and the ideal. We have all the necessary elements to build an ideal world. All we need now is the heart of love to realize it.

We have the technology to irrigate deserts, cultivate jungles and feed all the hungry people. We have the medicine to cure all the major diseases. We have the means to construct an ideal society. What then are we lacking? The answer is simple -- LOVE. True love.

If all people really loved and cared for their brother, the ideal could be established overnight. Even pollution -- the vast accumulation of our abuse of natural resources -- could be quickly restored if we had the heart for it. If society worked together to solve such problems, the problems could be easily solved. Conflict is not the answer. What we need is true love.

Even in our education system we find many problems. Our education seems to be almost exclusively directed towards gaining knowledge and techniques. The most essential part of our nature is almost completely ignored. This is our heart and personality. Our heart is not perfect from the beginning. Our ability to express love, like our ability to express creativity in art or music, needs education. This should normally take place in the family, developed and assisted in schools. However, with the increasing number of family problems -- the generation gap, broken homes, juvenile delinquency -- most people are missing the essential education of heart. Schools are not providing it, and in society we are feeling the results of this lacking element: more and more social disorder, moral breakdown, unrest and people seeking comfort in material things.

What can we do to solve such problems? The answer is simple. We can find a way to educate the hearts of men and we can work, serving others, to provide them with the necessary elements of love and concern to change their hearts. With the cooperation of even a few people the world could be changed very quickly. After all, the basic desire of each person whether young or old, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, is to receive true love and understanding. If we can provide this we can lead the world back to reality (sanity).

We stand on the threshold of a new age today. Whether we realize it or not depends on us.