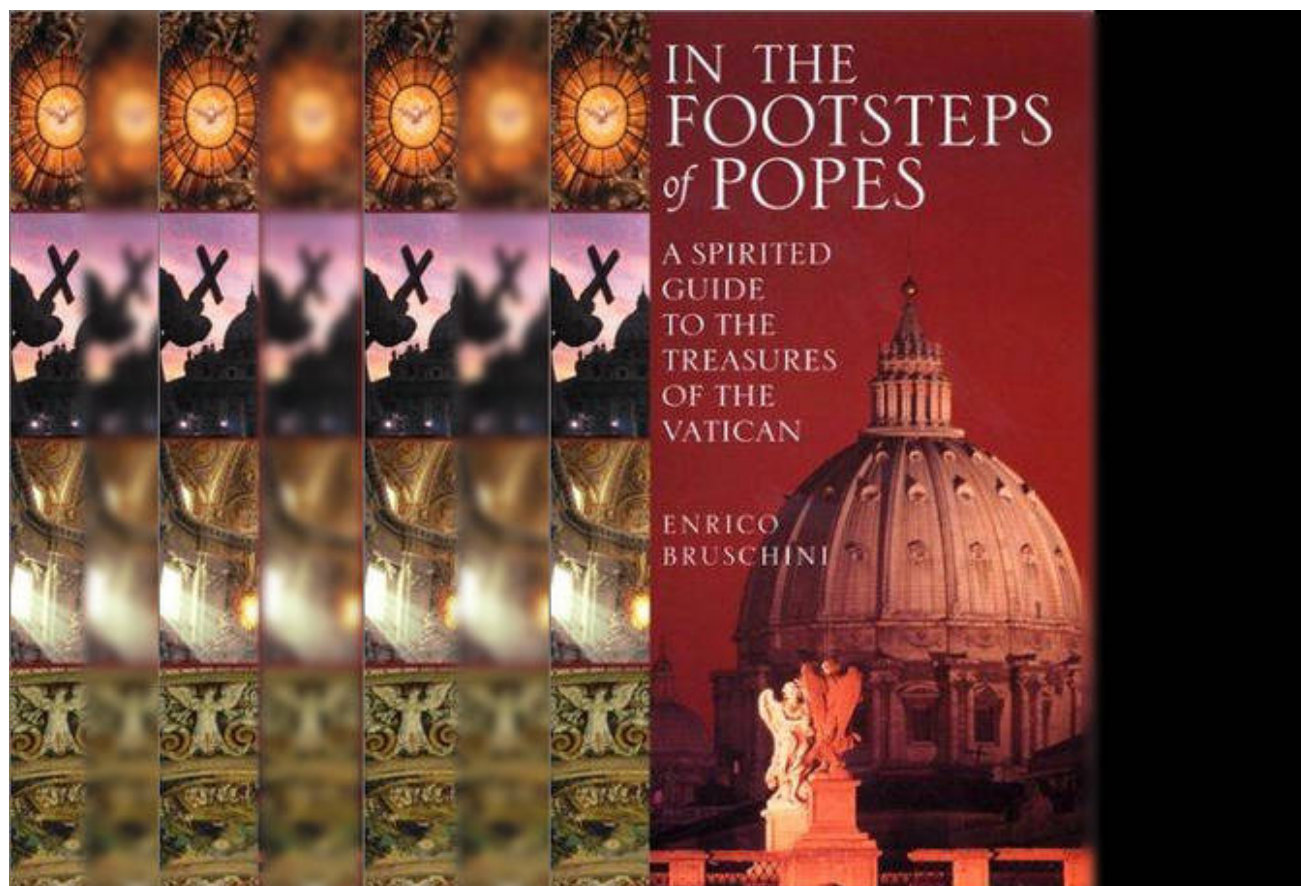




Enrico Bruschini: "Italy Is Wonderful. That's It!"

Maria Rita Latto (November 07, 2011)



Interview with the official historian of the US Embassy in Rome. Professor Bruschini is giving a lecture at the Italian Cultural Institute of New York about "The Cultural Contribution of Italy to Mankind" promoted by ILICA. @ Istituto Italiano di Cultura 686 Park Avenue, New York, NY (between 68th&69th street) Wednesday November 9th, 2011 5:45 pm

On November 9 at the [Italian Cultural Institute of New York](#) [2], Professor Enrico Bruschini begins a series of lectures entitled "The Cultural Contribution of Italy to Mankind" as part of the 150th anniversary of the unification of Italy. Although he was busy finalizing the details before leaving for the United States, we had a telephone conversation with Professor Bruschini that was full of anecdotes and memories of his life dedicated to art and the promotion of our country's positive image around the world.

His prestigious career led him, in 1984, to the appointment as the official art historian at the [U.S.](#)



[Embassy](#) [3] in Rome, and later as the curator of fine arts until 1998 when he retired. In 1989, the embassy had also given him the responsibility of being the official tour guide of Rome, accompanying through the Eternal City distinguished guests from the United States that included Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, many governors, and members of Congress and the Senate.

He established lasting friendships with some of these guests such as Clinton and his family. From the first meeting, in fact, Hillary and Bill Clinton were so impressed by Professor Bruschini's expertise that they invited him to visit the [White House](#) [4] and the Oval Office on three separate occasions, making Bruschini the only Italian who can boast that record. The first meeting with the Clintons dates back to 1994. "Bill Clinton's staff had scheduled a visit lasting about twenty minutes," Bruschini recalls, "certainly very little time to visit such an important an archaeological site. The twenty minutes flew by in the blink of an eye, and after an hour and a half there was still so much to show my illustrious guest. With official meetings with senior Italian politicians looming, President Clinton reluctantly dismissed me with the promise that we would resume our tour of the Roman Forum as soon as possible right where we left off. Returning to Rome, years later, now as former U.S. President, Bill Clinton still wanted me to accompany him and his daughter Chelsea through the wonders of the Eternal City. And surprisingly, at the Roman Forum he remembered the exact spot where, years before, the visit had been interrupted and we then resumed our tour there." Professor Bruschini notes that over time the interest and love that Americans have for Italy, Rome, and art have not waned.

"Americans, in general, are curious, and this is a great trait. Curiosity," continues Bruschini, is the mother of science. In general, an American asks questions, tries to understand his surroundings, something that we Italians do not do, perhaps because we are too used to the art. Americans are able to perceive details that in the eyes of Italians often go unnoticed. For example, visiting the Sistine Chapel, I had several opportunities to reflect on things from which books were born, thanks to the curiosity of the Americans I accompanied on a visit there. Every person, famous or not, is struck by the incredible wealth of the artistic, historic, and cultural heritage of our beautiful country. Caspar Weinberger, defense secretary during Reagan's administration, asked me what Romans thought about war and I," Bruschini recalls, "cited the Latin phrase *si vis pacem para bellum*, that is, if you want peace be ready for war. This phrase must have struck Weinberger since he later repeated it at meetings and conferences. Even this little anecdote shows how the Romans have left behind something lasting!"

And speaking of the Italy's cultural contribution to humanity, Bruschini cannot help but notice what Italy has given, such as the Etruscans, the Romans, the Renaissance, the Baroque. "At the moment, however, I am quite discouraged by Italy's image in the world. From a cultural point of view and, artistically speaking, these are unhappy times and I am very pessimistic. Look at how Pompeii was abandoned, look at the widespread indifference. I see so much disorganization. At the Coliseum, for example, there are only two ticket offices open but a thousand people are lined up. It's absurd. There is a complete lack of interest especially in art – and this means a lack of culture. Tourism is the greenest, most powerful Italian industry and we completely ignore it." Although he retired several years ago, Professor Bruschini is still very active, accompanying tourists through Rome and its wonders, maintaining contact with many American friends, and traveling often to the United States.

"I frequently go to America because I like to talk about Italian things in the United States. Americans love Italy and I am convinced that Italian art is the most beautiful, Italian food is the finest, and the generosity and kindness of Italians is unsurpassed. There is so much love, not only from Americans but also Italian Americans. Especially for Italian Americans, when an Italian comes to America it's like seeing a small piece of their homeland; their love is unquestionable. And for this reason, we should treat anyone who comes to Italy much better – for example, by making services more efficient rather than having them waste so much time, often hours, lined up waiting to visit monuments." There is a phrase that Professor Bruschini cannot swallow: "but in the end Italy is beautiful." "Why?" asks the professor. "Shouldn't it be enough to say that Italy is beautiful, period? I have heard this phrase for years, not just recently. It's unbearable."

The Coliseum is one of the most visited monuments by Americans, but the [Vatican Museums](#) [5], especially after the restoration of the Sistine Chapel, are also immensely popular. "Even there," Bruschini notes, "there are very few metal detectors at the entrance and huge lines form. It's



absurd.”

The time flew by as I spoke with Professor Bruschini. There’s just enough time for a final reflection on the conference which will take place on November 9: “This time the reservations were so numerous that there was a change in venue for a larger room. It had happened for the presentation of my book *In the Footsteps of Popes*.” And, when asked what he will bring with him to New York, he replied: “As always, I carry with me Italian spirit, Italian beauty, Italian art....”

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