



The Holy See

*ADDRESS OF PAUL VI TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC**

Friday, 22 September 1972

Mr. President,

With respectful thought, you desired that your first official visit outside the frontiers of the Italian State, of which the confidence of your fellow citizens has called you to be Head, should be reserved for the Supreme Pastor of that Catholic Church which has her centre in Rome, for the Servant of the Servants of God who has his episcopal see in Rome and takes from Rome a denomination that is in turn the object of veneration and of repulsion, though always rich in a century old history, not obscure and not inglorious.

We are deeply grateful to you, Mr. President, for this thought and consideration. And that not only for the honour paid, in our humble person, to the spiritual and religious mission entrusted to us, but also because we know that this gesture of yours corresponds to a deep conviction of your spirit, as an Italian: mindful of the ties that have bound in the centuries, and today no less than in the past, unite the Italian Nation to the Catholic Church and to this See of Peter's.

We also know of the sentiments of affectionate and cordial consideration which you nourish for us personally, for our humble self. We desire to give you public confirmation, on this solemn occasion, that these sentiments, accompanied by sincere appreciation for your eminent gifts as a man, a Christian, a scholar, a statesman, are sincerely reciprocated by us.

But, beyond your person, and worthily represented by you, we are happy to see the whole Italian people particularly close to us today. We are glad to welcome their greeting and return their wishes for every good.

History – but why not say Providence? – has bound the course of their lives so closely to the

events of the Papacy, ever since the humble fisherman from Galilee landed in the heart of the Roman empire and placed there his Chair as Pastor of the Eternal, City and of the World. An extraordinary prerogative, for those who believe in the divine character of the Church of Christ, and also, we think, for those who have the sense of the lofty human values of which Christian civilizations is the bearer; but not without burdens; not free of responsibilities.

Aware of this, this Apostolic See feels the duty of responding by loyally auguring and warmly fostering, in the limits of its possibilities and in the respect of the spheres of respective competences, the progress, also on the civil plane, of the Country by which it is surrounded, so to speak, and to which; also because of a particular canonical title, the Pope owes his pastoral ministry.

For a considerable number of years now the relations between the Holy See and Italy, which had known, in preceding ages, periods of bitter tension and painful rupture, have reached a just harmony, the validity of which seems confirmed by the fact that it has continued throughout the deep changes that the Italian situation has experienced in the meantime, and which the new democratic State has assumed among the fundamental norms that sustain its existence.

The Holy See intends, on its side, faithfully to respect this harmony and the solemn Pacts that constitute its juridical basis. Nay more, it intends to promote them, confident that also on the part of the Italian State an identical intention will not be lacking, not only as regards the provisions of the Treaty, but also for the exact application and interpretation of the norms – no less essential to ensure correct and cordial relations – of the Concordat.

With regard to the latter, the Holy See has declared and repeats its readiness, in agreement with the Italian Government and with open and sincere will, to examine the opportuneness of those bilateral revisions that may be prompted by changed situations and by the new requirements of the times.

Even more than on juridical instruments, however, the Holy See wishes to base its confidence on ever better, more cordial and more positive relations with Italy, on the Catholic sentiments of its people, on the effort of its rulers to meet the legitimate expectations of citizens, on respect of the liberties and rights that the Constitution of the State solemnly and amply guarantees.

The constant efforts of the Church, strengthened and adapted to present necessities by the impulse given by the recent II Vatican Council, aim at preserving and increasing the Christian patrimony of the Italian Nation. For respect of the general principles of freedom and law on which, and not on privilege, the Church is determined to rely, the Holy See has confidence in the spirit that has emerged in the new Italy and which all Italians will feel called upon to protect.

There is no need to tell you, Mr. President, that such protection, to be lasting and effective,

presupposes a solid and convinced moral formation, in the present generation and even more in the future ones.

This is a field in which the concerns of the Church coincide the true interest of the State; because only a robust moral structure, such as the Christian religion, can offer particularly, ensures Nations that concurrence of generous opening to the most noble ideals, love of freedom, sensitiveness to the reasons of justice and human solidarity, disinterested commitment to service of the common good, which constitutes their greatness and guarantees Peoples internal peace, social progress and independence.

We believe, therefore, that we are manifesting our affection for this Italy, so near to us, and not just carrying out an important office of our ministry, when we wish for her a family organization and morals which correspond to her genuine traditions, not just religious but also lay, and which make her feel not obliged to imitate but rather called upon, if anything, to be a model for others; or when we invoke, in public and private life, that respect for the norms of morality which is the vaunt and strength of peoples and which befits, in a very special way, a highly Catholic Nation such as Italy.

Faithful to her historical identity, which makes her heir to the juridical though of ancient Rome and to the spiritual and religious riches of Christian Rome, Italy will be increasingly able to carry out also a precious mission within the international community, in strengthening the voice of law before the depreciable voice of licence and violence and in upholding the cause of justice and peace.

These, Mr. President, are the wishes that well up from our heart, on the occasion of your welcome visit, for Italy, present here in you. The wish for religious and moral greatness. The wish for continued friendly relations with this Apostolic See and for useful service for the family of peoples. The wish, at the same time, for peace, welfare and prosperity for all its populations, in industrious collaboration of the living forces of the Nation, in recognition of respective rights and mutual responsibilities, in attention given with a generous sense of duty to the needier and less privileged regions and social strata.

We entrust these wishes, accompanied by the ones are formulate for you, Mr. President, and for your lofty mission, to God, from whom we invoke the most elect blessings for Italy and for all her sons.

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