



# The Holy See

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***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO H.E. MR. SIGNOR BRUNO BOTTAI,  
AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Monday, 25 June 1979*

*Mr. Ambassador,*

I am really grateful to you for the respectful expressions of homage you have kindly addressed to me with such noble words, prompted by deep conviction, at the moment of beginning, with the presentation of the Letters of Credence, your Mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the Italian republic to the Holy See.

These expressions, although in the brevity imposed by the occasion urge my spirit to plunge, even if only in a fleeting moment of thoughtful pause, into evocative consideration of those mysterious historical events and providential coincidences, which have, in the course of the Christian era, led to constructing and weaving deep bonds between the Italian Nation and this Apostolic See. Italy has benefitted in a privileged way from a source of civilization and elevation of man's dignity such as is, in the mind of her divine Founder, the Catholic Church, which here in Rome, in the person of the Vicar of Christ, has the visible foundation of her unity.

Since the time when Saint Peter landed on the banks of the Tiber, with its waters flowing with history, placing in this city, already an incomparable teacher of civil society, his See as Pastor, of Rome and of the world, it can well be said that a deep spiritual revolution, started in Palestine, spread from this country all over the world.

How could I fail to stress forcefully and with graceful satisfaction the cause and the circumstances which - as you highlighted with a delicate reference - contributed to edifying, though in the limits permitted to an action exercised by men, those spiritual, moral, and civil values which make the Italian people respected, honoured, and loved in the union of Nations? It is not a question,

certainly, of underestimating the multiple human factors, which have an impact of their own, but of pointing out how they, too - in the spirit of man, who by his very nature is open to transcendent demands and goals - are indebted to the Christian faith. The latter, often not explicitly and always discreet in its pedagogical approach, in addition to raising man to the supernatural order is entirely aimed at releasing in man himself the noblest and most virtuous potentialities of his innermost being.

The humble Head of the Universal Church - chosen furthermore by inscrutable design from the Slav race after an uninterrupted series of Italian Popes for many centuries - on receiving the new Ambassador of a Nation that has been the object of such special designs, borne along by a wave of memories, emotions, and solemn and serious thought, I cannot but stop, as I pay tribute to the virtues of the Italians, to consider the gifts that the Almighty has lavished with divine liberality on this country.

Owing to its generous provision of treasures of culture, art and industriousness, although amid the sufferings that accompanied her history and the laborious struggle she had to make to reach unity, Italy is a great country, a country that has won a place in men's hearts. But above all owing to her Christian history, the country you are preparing to represent offers a nobility of traditions, a wealth of spiritual values, that confer special duties and responsibilities on her. Christianity is present in her cultural development, it animated her social sensitivity, it also permeated the formation from remote times of a national sentiment which linked the various populations of the peninsula together. I am happy to recall at this moment the great religious figures of Italy such as St Benedict, St Francis, St Catherine, Don Bosco and Don Orione who, while they were intrepid witnesses to the Gospel, worked at the same time to guide the fate of their contemporaries towards goals of peace, welfare and prosperity.

If it is true, as you, Mr. Ambassador, wished to recall, that today the country is going through difficult moments, yet the renewed awareness of such a rich spiritual heritage cannot but offer your fellow citizens the strength, the courage, and the resourcefulness to find, even in sacrifice and renunciation, the ways to worthy and lasting progress. It is a question certainly of becoming conscious of one's own inner resources and of appealing to the deep ideals of the spirit.

In this constant effort to increase the truly human riches of the Nation, the Italian State will find in the Catholic Church loyal support and an animating force which, in a religious perspective more in line with the present necessities, such as took shape after the [Second Vatican Ecumenical Council](#), is also concerned with nourishing, in her children of every people, the deep motives that justify the sacrifices necessary to prepare a more prosperous future.

The determination and the capacity to face up to these sacrifices call for a strong moral conviction, for the formation of which the Church will not fail to strive with might and main, since that fully corresponds to her mission of recuperation, liberation, and salvation of consciences. Before the

phenomenon of blind violence and destructive terrorism which still trouble Italian society and spread among its members agonizing alarm and paralysing fear, the Catholic Church, while it turns minds away from the hallucinating temptation of an equally provoking and oppressive retaliation, is concerned to foster in hearts, of the young in the first place, openness to ideals of freedom, justice, brotherly solidarity, love, and disinterested service of the common good.

These are the virtues that constitute and guarantee the greatness, internal peace, and social progress of a country; the virtues that today, at the end of a season traversed by agnostic and materialistic systems, sensitive and enlightened consciences are seeking with more intense longing

The bishops of Italy, and in the first place the Pope who owes Italy his pastoral service in a special way, will leave no stone unturned to urge the young generations towards the construction of a more peaceful and just society. These young generations are for me an object of particular attention and love, which I have manifested right from the beginning of my universal ministry.

The Church, in fact, as I have had occasion to stress repeatedly, puts herself, by her very nature, in the service of man, his advancement his development, his rights, his progress, according to the liberating anthropology of the Gospel message which puts at the centre of her deepest concern the liberation of man from any form of slavery and oppression. God wants a free man, aware of his own spiritual dignity and responsible for the good of all.

The common solicitude of the State and the Church for the good of man and of the citizen postulates a harmony of relations and a spirit of respectful friendship; up to now these have been safeguarded in Italy by the Lateran Concordat. It is my deep wish, and my certainty, that they will continue to be safeguarded in the future by virtue of that same instrument. As you recalled, once the studies on the matter and the bilateral consultations are concluded, there will be introduced into it those amendments that the different conditions of the times, evaluated with an open spirit in the light of the recent Ecumenical Council, and the transformation of the constitutional framework of Italy, suggest as being opportune.

I am eager to show my affection for Italy, which I learned to love with inner predilection from my student years and in particular during the period of my stay in Rome to complete my theological formation. I aspire also to carry out with all commitment my pastoral service for a country that is so close, and by whose cordial and joyful devotion I daily feel surrounded and enveloped. So I invoke from the Lord abundant gifts of illumination and grace in order that the public and private life of its citizens may be nourished and made dignified by a deep religious sense, and by the exercise of solid Christian and human virtues, and that it may also be gladdened by serene prosperity.

To this wish I join my personal wish for the highly meritorious President of the Italian Republic. To him goes at this moment the respectful attestation of my consideration for the prestige and

authority with which he represents and guides the Nation; and while I wish you, Mr. Ambassador, a successful mission and bid you a hearty welcome, I warmly send my Apostolic Blessing to the whole Italian People and to its Authorities.

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