



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr ALBERTO LEONCINI BARTOLI,
AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO THE HOLY SEE***

Thursday, 4 September 1997

Mr Ambassador,

In receiving the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Italian Republic to the Holy See, I am pleased to extend a respectful and cordial greeting to the President of the Republic, the Honourable Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, and to the whole nation.

There are many States represented at this Apostolic See, but the relationship with the country which has been so close to the original seat of the Successor of Peter for 2,000 years is very special. Truly the Pope has never been a stranger in the "beautiful country that the Apennines divide, the sea and the Alps surround": he has not and is not a stranger because of his office as Bishop of Rome, which specifies and incarnates here his role as Pastor of the universal Church.

Even — especially — in the most difficult hours, in dark and complicated situations, the love of the Supreme Pontiff for this dear people was not lacking nor was his commitment to their protection and welfare. From the time of the invasions and migrations of peoples to the bombardments and destruction of the last world war, the Successors of Peter — in the changing conditions of the time — did everything possible for the people whom nature and history had placed around their Chair. Even in our time, with an extraordinary "Great Prayer for Italy", I wished to call the attention of everyone to the problems that the events of the '90s have raised in this beloved country, in order to awaken new energies and creative fidelity in the light of an ancient and still flourishing tradition of commitment and sacrifice for the common good, as a response to Christian truth.

In particular, the century about to end has been marked by a growth in mutual understanding

between Italy and the Holy See. The misunderstandings and difficulties of the previous century were soon overcome. The Conciliation of 11 February 1929 fulfilled the dream of the best spirits who wanted to "give Italy back to God and God back to Italy", showing likewise that nothing irreparable had ever happened between the country and the Successors of Peter. It now seems clear to everyone that the Holy See's reservations regarding certain aspects of the unification were not dictated by ambitions for property, much less for earthly power, but by the just defence of absolute independence from the surrounding territorial sovereignty.

Then, when the wounds of totalitarianism and war were still open, the wisdom of many wished to insert into the Constitution of the nascent and free Republic the principle of the independence and sovereignty of each order, while nobody questioned any longer the small and almost symbolic space necessary for the Apostolic See to carry out its mission throughout the world.

Again, with the Revision Agreement of 1984, the same spirit presided over the updating, by mutual consent, of the Lateran Treaties, stating clearly, as had already been expressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, that between Church and State there is no opposition but sharing and co-operation in protecting the human person in his individual and social expressions.

The relations between the Holy See and the Italian Republic, we can safely say on the basis of well-established historical experience, truly crown a web of relationships, an indisputable mode of discussion, rich in results and potential. The Church, for her part, has a wealth of truth which she tirelessly proposes to man in the various aspects of his social structures. It is above all in the family that Christian and moral doctrine recognize the first and natural environment for welcoming life from its conception. The family, born from the love of a man and a woman, which traditions and the law hallow as the basic cell of society, expects the dictate of the fundamental law of the Republic to be fully applied where it "recognizes the rights of the family as a natural society based on marriage" (art. 29). The family, therefore, has a basic function in the organization of society, and it must be encouraged and protected, even in its economic and fiscal aspects. It cannot be abandoned to the corrosion of relativism, because life and the very future of the country are in its bosom.

In this regard many voices have already been raised with distress at seeing Italy relegated to a low birth rate. In this we can see a closed-minded attitude, a distrust in the future of national society and perhaps a selfish tendency. It is a common hope that life will be helped to grow and flourish with all the benefits that can be contributed to it.

The school, in a similar perspective, has an essential role in building the Italy of tomorrow. Old barriers, even of a psychological nature, are collapsing, but the same principle that calls all citizens to make their contribution to the common good through the widest and most active participation demands the full and mature freedom *of* the school and *in* the school. Culture requires dialogue and discussion; citizens and families expect from the State that reasonable

assistance which makes possible the effective and indisputable exercise of the right to choose their cultural horizon without discrimination and burdens that are even economically unsustainable.

But everything would be in vain if there were no work. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council had already put forth the concept of participating in creation which is inherent in daily work, and I confirmed this in several Encyclicals. Now young people particularly fear the lack of stable and stimulating employment. Public authorities, economic forces, trade unions and all individuals have the serious task of creating the conditions for genuine employment opportunities, such as can deter young people from the temptations of laziness, easy gain or even criminal activities.

The Catholic community can make its own contribution to these developments, and much is already being done, from volunteer work to the "cultural project" that the Italian Episcopal Conference is preparing. All this reconfirms a truth that cannot be denied: the faithful and the Church are not strangers in this country. They are fully part of it. From their very long, and perhaps unique, tradition, from the teaching of the Magisterium, from Revelation itself, they find ideas for remedying the evils as well as the needs of the country, and research continues to make new contributions. It is certainly not by chance that the country's true and profound identity is unequivocally revealed in Christianity.

With the fall of so many borders and the birth of a new Europe, the duty to enrich the continent with Italy's specific charism becomes increasingly urgent. To the glories of its past, to the creative initiative of its present, are added the basic features of its Catholic identity, which has been and continues to be so evident in art, in social activities and in so many journeys of faith and culture. The soul of Italy is a Catholic soul, and in this regard there are great expectations for what it can express among its sister nations, now finally at peace —expectations that are further destined to be proved true in the exhilarating and hope-filled perspective of the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which you so opportunely mentioned. This event is destined to be a time of human, civil and spiritual growth for the beloved Italian nation as well. May the existing co-operation between the Holy See and Italy help to promote its complete success.

It is with these hopeful words that I extend to Your Excellency my most fervent wishes for the successful accomplishment of your mission, and I cordially impart to you my Apostolic Blessing and willingly extend it to the persons accompanying you, to your family and to the beloved Italian nation

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