



The Holy See

**LETTER OF POPE PAUL VI
TO HIS EXCELLENCY GIUSEPPE SARAGAT,
PRESIDENT OF THE ITALIAN REPUBLIC**

*To His Excellency GIUSEPPE SARAGAT
President of the Italian Republic*

Mr. President,

The occurrence of the centenary which Italy is about to celebrate obviously finds Us neither forgetful nor indifferent. It fills Our mind with memories, experiences and presages. The exceptional importance of that event certainly cannot fail to attract our thoughts, especially by reason of its two principal historical aspects: the end of the temporal power of the Popes over the "Pontifical States" and the annexation of Rome to Italy, which consolidated its unity and established its capital in it.

Permit Us, Mr. President, to open Our heart to you with sincere simplicity. The sad discord between Church and State produced by that event, the famous "Roman Question", which kept the minds of Italians so sharply and so long divided, has been ended, by free and mutual agreement.

We therefore deliberately refrain from all retrospective evaluations of an historical, juridical, political and sentimental kind. We will fix Our attention on the present, and with pure pastoral benevolence consider the second aspect of that same event, the happy results which it had for Italy, the country which We cannot but love with particular and intense predilection.

We therefore desire to express to you, Mr. President, and to the whole Italian People Our best wishes for its present and future civil fortunes. And what wishes can the Pope have for a nation which is commemorating the culminating event of its rebirth? Our wishes are for stability, concord, prosperity, social and moral progress, and peace for the whole of the Italian People. Our wishes are all the more lively because of the complexity and gravity of the vicissitudes of this first century

of unified national life; they seek to equal the honour and the commitment which Italy assumed when taking the august name of Rome to itself. It is a great name and a great commitment.

Many varying judgments might be made on the Papacy in regard to this singular City, with its centuries and centuries of life. But We believe that no one will wish to deny the appreciation and love which the Popes have had for the City and its cultural inheritance. We are sure that Italy will always be a careful and inspired guardian of Rome, now that it is sovereign there and the inheritor of its incomparable legacy of human and Christian culture and civilization, examples of which may be seen in its monuments, the Latin language; and Roman law. We are sure that Italy will not only preserve those lofty values, but will also be capable of drawing inexhaustible fruitfulness from them, for itself and for the world. The very passion with which Italy took over the former papal possession and administration of Rome and its territories is a guarantee of noble, ever vigilant and active conscience in this regard. We are sincerely glad at this, and therefore express most happy and cordial best wishes for the future. We dare say that no one more than We is in a position to offer such an augury.

This is so, Mr. President, because We are still Roman, and remain Roman by virtue of an extinguishable title, that which pertains to Us as Bishop of this most beloved City, and by which We are Head of the Catholic Church. We are thus still profoundly bound to this eternal City, and, as regards Ourselves, are concerned solely for that liberty and that independence which may permit normal exercise of Our spiritual functions in the City and in the world. We remain convinced that Our dwelling in Rome is by no means a hindrance to free expansion of Italian civil life. Indeed We like to believe that Our presence on the banks of the Tiber does more than a little to arouse love and honour for the name of Rome in all the earth.

Today honoured and peacefully accepted conditions regulate relationships between Italy and the Apostolic See. A delicate and precious equilibrium has been attained between State and Church, as is well known, by means of those Lateran Pacts, the validity of which the Italian Constitution assures with wise and far-sighted vision by means of a particular and solemn guaranty. We think that these Pacts, that is, the Treaty and Concordat, may be remembered with gratitude to God and considered as an honour to the Italian People on this centenary of that disputed event. They may be regarded as a provident juridical accomplishment of it and a happy moral and spiritual epilogue, not merely a local and temporary, but a general and perpetual one.

It is with this evocation of the occasion, Mr. President of the Italian Republic, that We pray you to accept Our deferential respect, Our greetings and good wishes, and Our Apostolic Benediction.

From the Vatican, 18 September 1970.

PAUL PP. VI

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