

jhs

Aug. 12, 1966

Dear Vittorio Emanuele:

I have your eloquent letter of August 5 and I wish to reply personally, though I do not ordinarily do this in such cases. It is necessary to reply personally to try to explain a misunderstanding.

First of all let me say that I have the deepest veneration for the nobility of Italian culture and tradition and especially for Sicily, one of the most ancient cradles of western civilization.

Now: due to a misunderstanding of my use of certain injurious words, you accuse me of name calling. What is meant by name calling? The use of injurious names with the intention to injure. Everything depends on the intention and not on the names used. You do not agree? Let me put it this way. When men were liberated from the concentration camps and returned home, sometimes they would meet together in a celebration of their freedom and would wear their prison clothes. The prison clothes were garments of ~~sh~~ shame. But when they were worn with the intention to celebrate, they became garments of honor.

The injurious names which have been used as insults in the past can also be used ironically and defiantly in order to honor and not to shame. My intention in using those names was to say this: "You Americans have scorned other nations and races, but you do not realize that you are the same as they and that you are on the same plane as all the rest of the human race therefore you have dishonored them unjustly."

Reading the poems you sent, I believe it was probably the intention of the authors to use these names in this way. Now here is the problem: it may be that you are so sensitive on the point that you just can't stand to see those names used in any way whatever. On the other hand there is such a thing as irony and I used the names in irony, in order to honor those who had been insulted. That is my explanation.

In other words, man, I am on your side. I am for you and not against you. I certainly regret all the shame and dishonor that Italian people have had to suffer and I have no intention of adding to it. On the contrary it was my intention to protest against it. You did not understand this. I hope it is clear now.

God bless you and may you have prosperity and peace
and all joy in Christ Our Lord,