

The agrivoltaic agreement between Italy and the Holy See: continuity and innovation in the wake of the Lateran Treaty

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On 31 July 2025, at Palazzo Borromeo, the seat of the Italian Embassy to the Holy See, an agreement was signed between the Italian Republic and the Holy See for the construction of an agrivoltaic plant in Santa Maria di Galeria¹. This is an extraterritorial area on the outskirts of Rome, whose legal status dates back to the Agreement of 8 October 1951 with the Italian Government², stipulated to guarantee the papal broadcaster global distribution of its content³. Since 1957, this area has been home to the Vatican Radio facility, currently used for shortwave transmissions⁴.

The project had already been announced by Pope Francis in his Apostolic Letter in the form of a *Motu Proprio* “*Fratello Sole*” on 21 June 2024⁵. In that document, the Pontiff appointed two special commissioners, the President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See (APSA) and the President of the Governorate of Vatican City State, entrusting them with the task of promoting and implementing a system that would integrate the production of electricity from renewable sources with the preservation of the agricultural use of the land concerned.

The agrivoltaic system has two objectives: on the one hand, to guarantee the energy supply of the radio station already present on the site; on the other, to contribute to the achievement of energy self-sufficiency for Vatican City State, in coherence with the ecological vision strongly supported by Pope Francis. In the same *Motu Proprio*, the Pope reiterated the urgency of «making

¹ The text of the Agreement, presumably divided into five articles, has not yet been officially disclosed.

² Agreement between the Holy See and Italy concerning Vatican radio stations in Santa Maria di Galeria and Castel Romano, 8 October 1951.

³ Authoritative doctrine has highlighted the peculiarity of the case. In order to guarantee the extraterritoriality of the area, in fact, recourse was not made to the provisions of Article 15 of the Treaty - which provides for Italy's obligation to grant real immunity when the Holy See needs it for activities related to its functions - but rather to a specific international convention, namely the aforementioned Agreement between the Holy See and Italy for the Vatican radio stations in Santa Maria di Galeria and Castel Romano of 8 October 1951, which came into force with Law No. 680 of 13 June 1952. In this sense, GIUSEPPE DALLA TORRE, *L'extraterritorialità nel Trattato del Laterano*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2016, p. 93.

⁴ Due to their size and complexity, Vatican Radio's transmitting facilities could not be located within the limited territory of Vatican City.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio “Fratello Sole”*, 21 June 2024.

changes to our lifestyles, production and consumption patterns in order to combat global warming, one of the main causes of which is the pervasive use of fossil fuels»⁶.

In line with the principles set out in the Encyclical Letter “*Laudato si*” and the Apostolic Exhortation “*Laudate Deum*”, the gradual abandonment of non-renewable energy sources represents for every Catholic institution a choice of «moral consistency», as well as an opportunity to redefine the «moral code» of contemporary society. Through divestment from fossil fuels, it is possible to promote and implement a comprehensive ecological conversion, supported by «an educational programme, a lifestyle and spirituality that shape resistance to the advancing technocratic paradigm»⁷, which tends to exert «its dominance over the economy and politics»⁸.

The project also received the support of Pope Leo XIV who, during his visit on 19 June 2025 to the extraterritorial area of Santa Maria di Galeria, particularly emphasised the value of international cooperation in protecting creation, a priority that remains central to his pontificate. With this in mind, the agreement provides for the possibility of allocating any excess electricity produced to Italy for social purposes.

From a legal point of view, the agreement between the Italian Republic and the Holy See fits within the established framework of relations established by the Lateran Treaty of 11 February 1929, confirming its continuing vitality and relevance. This regulatory framework has now proven capable of extending its scope to include scientific, environmental and energy issues. In this context, it is envisaged that, as is already the case for the radio transmission Centre⁹, the agrivoltaic plant will also benefit from the legal immunities and privileges expressly enshrined in Articles 15 and 16 of the Lateran Treaty. As is well known, Article 15 guarantees the Holy See the same immunities recognised by international law to the premises of diplomatic agents, both with regard to the properties referred to in Articles 13, 14 (first and second paragraphs) and 15 of the Treaty, and with regard to “other buildings in which the Holy See may in future see fit to establish other departments”. Article 16, on the other hand, provides for the exemption of a number of papal properties from restrictions or expropriation for public use, except by prior agreement with the Holy See, as well as from the imposition of taxes, both ordinary and extraordinary, by the State or any other entity.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Encyclical Letter Laudato si. On Care for Our Common Home*, 111.

⁸ *Ivi*, 109.

⁹ Cf. Agreement between the Holy See and Italy concerning the Vatican radio stations at Santa Maria di Galeria and Castel Romano, 8 October 1951, point no. 1.

At the international level, the Agreement is in line with the commitments made by both States under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement, multilateral regulatory frameworks through which the global community is working to combat «dangerous human interference with the climate system», and to which the Vatican has acceded with the intention of contributing «to the efforts of all States to offer, according to their respective responsibility and capacity, an adequate response to the challenges posed to humanity and our common home by climate change»¹⁰.

Finally, from a symbolic and systemic point of view, the initiative places the Vatican City State among the select group of States - together with Nepal, Paraguay, Ethiopia, Albania, Bhutan, Iceland and Congo - capable of fully meeting their energy needs through renewable sources. This is a significant achievement, which gives the Vatican a distinctive position within global climate governance as an actor capable of offering a virtuous example of environmental responsibility and sustainable care for creation.

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Source: Holy See Press Office Bulletin, 31 July 2025, available at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2025/07/31/0535/00957.html>.

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio "Fratello Sole"*, 21 June 2024.